

No 128

1872



LIGHT & AMUSING LITERATURE

FOR HOURS OF RELAXATION

LONDON SOCIETY an Illustrated Magazine

AUGUST



LONDON

R. BENTLEY & SON, NEW BURLINGTON ST., W.

ONE SHILLING

Stories from London Society, Part 5

A Weird Story of Bruges by James Grant - February 1874

Gubmuh by J. G. Montefiore - April 1874

The Veiled Portrait by James Grant - Christmas Annual 1874

The Pierced Heart by Captain Mayne Reid - Holiday Annual 1875

The Nymph of the Waterfall by B. Montgomerie Ranking (poem) -
Holiday Annual 1875

AgO,NO₅: A Doctor's Story by H. Savile Clarke - Christmas Annual 1875

The Cursed Chapelle by B. Montgomerie Ranking (poem) - Christmas
Annual 1875

The Bridal of La Guillotière by O. S. T. D. - Christmas Annual 1875

The Triumph of Lucifer by B. Montgomerie Ranking (poem) -
March 1876

The Banshee's Warning by Anonymous - Christmas Annual 1876

[Hertford O'Donnell's Warning by Mrs. Riddell was later printed
under this title, but it is not the same story]

Behind the Scenes in London Society: I. The Ghosts of London Midnight
by Anonymous - January 1877

Twelve o'Clock Noon by Anonymous - August 1877

A Coachful of Ghosts by Anonymous - Christmas Annual 1877

The Ghost in the Bank of England by Anonymous - Christmas
Annual 1879

The Legend of the Willow-Pattern Plate by C. C. (poem) - Holiday
Annual 1880

A WEIRD STORY OF BRUGES.

SIX months ago, when in Bruges, that 'quaint old town of art and song,' as Longfellow styles it—a town all unchanged since the ancient days of Flanders—I became cognisant of the following events, by happening to be present at the examination of the chief actor in them, before one of the two burgomasters who govern the city.

With a Belgian friend, I had been lounging in a window of the club-house that overlooks the spacious square known as the Grande Place (above which towers the wonderful belfry, from whence one may look down on the frontiers of Holland as on a map, and from whence, it is said, the mouth of the Thames may be seen on a clear day), when a police escort, with swords drawn, conducted a prisoner past, towards the Palais de Justice. He was a young man of the better class, apparently, very pale, very sad, and depressed in aspect, very handsome in face, graceful in bearing, and most unlike a criminal. His hands, however, were manacled, and a crowd of workmen and children clattered noisily around him in their wooden sabots.

As the rumour spread that a terrible assassination had just been committed, we followed the escort to the magnificent old hall in that edifice, which was whilom the Palais du Franc de Bruges, and which contains a chimney-piece occupying one entire side of it, with gigantic statues carved in wood, and marble bas-reliefs representing chastely the story of Susannah and the Elders, as the reader may find in his 'John Murray.'

From that which transpired at the examination of the prisoner,

and what I read in a few subsequent numbers of the little local paper named 'La Patrie,' I gleaned the substance of the following story, which, in some of its features, reminds one of the case of Oriental metempsychosis mentioned in the 'Spectator'—the passing of the soul from body to body, including the influences of mesmeric, crystalline, and magnetic forces, though I do not pretend to know anything of the learned and mysterious jargon concerning those matters; but much of which I heard that day referred to in the Palais de Justice.

A mile or so on the level highway beyond the beautiful round towers of the loopholed and embattled Porte St. Croix, one of the still remaining barriers of the old fortifications, there stands at a little distance from the road, a quaint old Flemish dwelling-house, built of red brick, and almost hidden among chestnut and apple-trees. If we are to believe the 'Chronyke Van Vlanderen,' it was once a shooting-box of Charles the Bold, and near it Mary of Burgundy received the fall from her horse which proved so fatal. Be all this as it may, it is a house with many pointed gables, strange outshots and beams of quaintly-carved oak; and therein, with his nephew, Hendrik, and an old housekeeper, resided Dr. Van Gansendonck, called Doctor, not from his profession, but for his learning, as he enjoyed the reputation of understanding all languages, living and dead, and being master of every science, human and divine; and was regarded by the simple and religious Brugois as altogether a miracle of a man in some respects.

Some there were who deemed

him a dangerous dupe to his own powers, and these were the clergy especially, who, with something of repugnance, drew their black cloaks closer about them when 'the doctor' passed them on the highway or in the narrow unpaved streets, as it was notorious that he never crossed the threshold of a church, or was known to lift his hat either to them or to the numerous Madonnas that decorate every street corner, and many a doorway too, in Bruges.

The Herr Doctor, now past his sixtieth year, had, in some respects, decidedly a bad reputation, and a hundred and fifty years ago or so, might have ended his studies amid a blaze of tar-barrels in the Grande Place as a wizard, but in this our age of steam and telegraphy he was viewed as simply a learned eccentric, and as a dabbler in mesmerism, clairvoyance, the odic light, and second sight; but these occult mysteries, which the church condemns, he would seem to have carried to a length that seems strangely out of place in these days of hard facts and practical common-sense.

A forehead high and bald, a head tonsured round by a fringe of silvery hair, eyes keen and quick as those of a rattlesnake—eyes that seemed to glare through his gold-rimmed glasses, made the face of Herr Van Gansendonck so remarkable, that those who saw it never failed to be impressed by its strange expression of intellectual power, tinged with somewhat of insanity; but his visitors were few. His time was chiefly spent in his library; and as he was rich, being proprietor of more than one of those gigantic mills, the sails of which overshadow the grassy ramparts, he could afford to please himself by living as he chose, and seclusion was his choice. He seemed to have but

one favourite only—Hendrik—a brother's orphan son, whom he had adopted, educated, and who was to be his heir.

Hendrik was now in his twentieth year, decidedly handsome, but with dreamy blue eyes that had an expression in them one could not easily forget; yet the lad's temperament was poetic and enthusiastic, and now he had but recently returned to Bruges, after undergoing a course of study, and attending those lectures which are given on science, literature, and art at the library of the Museum in Brussels.

The grim old student hailed the return of the younger one with a pleasure that he did not conceal, and there was at least one more in Bruges that did so with joy.

This was Lenora, the daughter of Madame Van Eyck, a widow lady, residing in one of those quaint old houses at the Quai Espagnol. To her he had been betrothed, and the monetary plans of his uncle alone were awaited for their marriage, young though Hendrik was.

Bruges, according to an old monkish rhyme, has ever been celebrated for its pretty girls, but Lenora Van Eyck, a bright blonde of eighteen, was more than pretty—she was charming, with that wonderful bloom of complexion which is so truly Belgian; light, laughing, hazel eyes that were full of merriment, and all her ways and modes of expression piquant and attractive.

She had been one of the six young ladies who, clothed and veiled in white, were selected on the last Corpus Christi day to bear the gilt Madonna through the streets before the bishop. Lenora had been with her family at Blankenberg—the little Brighton of the Brugois—for

several weeks after the return of Hendrik to the house of his uncle; and when again they met at their favourite trysting place, the long walk of stately poplars by the canal near the Porte St. Croix, she soon became conscious of a strange and painful change in the bearing, the manner, and the eyes of her lover. Languor seemed to pervade every action; his face had become pale, his eyes more dreamy than ever, and he was unusually taciturn and abstracted.

Why was this? Lenora asked of herself, while she watched him with that keenness of eye and anxiety of heart that are born of love and tenderness, for there was a singular mystery now about the once happy Hendrik that filled her with grave perplexity. Had his love for her changed? His eyes, though sad, were loving in expression as ever, when they met hers—yet even his smile was sad—so very sad!

Again and again, in her most winning way, she would implore Hendrik to reveal to her any secret that weighed upon his mind, but in vain. Why was it, she asked, that he, whom she had left so lively in bearing and happy in spirit, had now become so moody? and why was it that there were times when he seemed to feel himself compelled, as it were, to leave her suddenly and in haste, without a word of explanation, apology, or excuse? She pleaded without avail; Hendrik could but avert his pallid face, or cover his eyes with his hand, as if to shut out some painful vision or crush some worrying thought.

He dared not tell her—lest she should deem him mad, and so shrink from him—that his uncle, the Herr Van Gansendonck, had, mesmerically, acquired a mysterious and terrible influence over

him, and that by the mere power of will he could summon him to his presence at all times, wherever he might be, or with whomsoever he was engaged—even with herself; and that he, Hendrik, found himself totally powerless and incapable of effecting his emancipation from the bodily and mental thralldom under which he writhed!

He dared not tell her all this, or, further, that Herr Van Gansendonck had the power to set him asleep on a chair in his library, and then to cause his spirit (for this was alleged in the Palais de Justice) to disengage itself from the body, and go on distant missions through the air for thousands of miles in the course of a few minutes, or that when thus put to sleep, the Herr, by exciting his organ of *ideality*, could obtain such information as he wished on strange and abstruse subjects.

That he had become a helpless and nerve-shattered mesmeric medium, he thought at times he might confide to her; but even in this his courage failed him, for other and more terrifying convictions were creeping upon him; thus he shrank from telling the girl who loved him so dearly, that when his spiritual essence was despatched to distant lands, the Herr, by the same power, permitted *other* spirits to enter his body and use its members for purposes of their own. The horror of this idea, it was alleged, made the youth's life insupportable, for on awaking from these strange and involuntary trances, he would at times find on his person cuts and bruises he was all unconscious of receiving; sometimes his purse would be gone, or in its place might be found strange money and letters to and from individuals of whose existence he knew nothing.

All this was done by one whose power he could neither repel nor defy; and now he had the natural dread that if his body was made to obey the behests of these spiritual intruders, he might be led into some horrible predicament—the committal of a dreadful crime. Another might even come in his place and meet Lenora!

One evening as they sat on the grassy rampart that overlooked the great canal, the girl strove to rouse or soothe him by singing with great sweetness one of Jan Van Beer's Flemish songs; but the music of her voice and the poetry of the author of 'Zeik Jongeling' fell on Hendrik's ear in vain. When she paused,

'I dreamt of you last night, darling Lenora,' said the young man, looking at her with inexpressible tenderness; 'but such dreams are so tantalising, even more so than the dreams one has by day.'

'All your life seems one hazy dream now, Hendrik,' said Lenora somewhat petulantly.

'Forgive me, dearest, you know not what you talk of. My mind, I grant you, is a chaos, full of strange terrors, perplexity, and confusion; and times there are when I fear for my reason,' he added wildly, passing a hand over his forehead, and looking aside.

'Dear Hendrik, do not speak thus, I implore you.'

'I must—in whom can I confide, if not in you? And yet I dare not—I dare not!'

After a pause he spoke again, but with his eyes fixed, not on her, but on the still, deep water of the shining canal.

'This much I will tell you, Lenora. Yesterday, my uncle sent me on some business of his to the house of an advocate, Père Baas, near the Béguinage, a house in which I had never been before,

and I was shown into a room to wait. On looking round, to my astonishment, every article in it—and the room itself—the ceiling the stove, the windows, and the paintings—especially one by Hans Hemling—were all familiar to me, and I seemed to *recognise* every object there. "I was never here before," thought I; "and yet I must have been—but when? If so, there is a little window behind this picture, which opens to the garden of the Béguinage." I turned the picture, and lo! there was the little window in question; I saw through it the garden with all its cherry-trees and two or three béguines flitting about. Oh, Lenora, there is indeed some power beyond matter, proving that the soul is independent of the body!'

'It must have been a dream.'

'It was no dream,' replied Hendrik gloomily.

'But how do you account for the strange fancy?'

'My disembodied spirit must have been there, sent on some accursed errand by my uncle!'

'But you would die, Hendrik.'

'Not if another tenant were at hand,' replied Hendrik, gnashing his teeth.

Then the girl wept to hear him, as she naturally deemed it, raving thus.

'Such things cannot be,' said she, sobbing.

'My uncle says they may; and the theory is as old as the days of Pythagoras.'

'I know nothing of Herr Pythagoras; but this I know, that the Herr Van Gansendonck is a strange and bad man. Pardon me, dear Hendrik; but he never enters a church door, nor has he been to mass or confession for years. Leave him, and Bruges too, rather than become the victim of such dreadful delusions.'

'To do either is to leave and to lose you! I am his heir; and we have but to wait his pleasure—or, it may be, his death, to be so happy,' replied Hendrik sadly; and then they relapsed into silence. With Lenora it was silence induced by sorrow and alarm, while her lover seemed to let his thoughts slip away into dreamland.

The sultry summer evening breeze rustled the leaves near them; the honey-bees buzzed and hummed among the wild flowers and buttercups that grew on the old rampart; and far away could be heard the ceaseless chirping of the crickets.

Lenora's head rested on Hendrik's shoulder, and he was lost in thought, though mechanically toying with her hair, which shone like ripples of gold in the light of the setting sun.

He was aware that Lenora had begun to speak to him again; her voice seemed to mingle with the drowsy hum of the bees and the evening chimes or carillons in the distant spires; but he heard her as if he heard her not; till suddenly a thrill seemed to pass over him, as a secret and intuitive sense or knowledge that his terrible relation required his immediate presence, made him start from the grassy bank, snatch a hasty kiss, and hurry away by the arch of the Porte St. Croix, leaving Lenora mortified, sorrowful, and utterly bewildered by the abruptness of his departure.

'Oh, how changed he is!' thought she, as she proceeded slowly in the other direction towards her home on the Quai Espagnol.

On two or three occasions the unhappy Hendrik had, what he conceived to be, undoubted proof of his body having been, in the

intervals of mesmeric trances, tenanted by another spirit than his own; and this strange and wild conviction caused such intense horror and loathing of his uncle that the expressions to which he gave utterance to more than one of his friends—more than all to Lenora—were recalled, most fatally for himself, at a future time.

One day, in the Rue des Augustines, he was accosted by Brother Eusebius, a Capuchin.

'Friend Hendrik,' said he, severely and gravely, 'was it becoming in you to be roystering as you were yesterday at the low estaminet in the market-place, and with such companions—fellows in blouses and sabots?'

'Impossible, Brother Eusebius; I was not there,' faltered Hendrik, as the usual fear crept over him.

'I, myself, saw you. And, moreover, you looked at me.'

'When—at what hour?'

'Six in the evening.'

'Six!'

Hendrik felt himself grow pale. He remembered that at that identical time he was under the hands of his uncle. He groaned in sore and dire perplexity, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, while the Capuchin continued to address him in tones of rebuke and earnest remonstrance.

'Have I a double-ganger, or am I becoming crazed?' urged Hendrik. 'Believe me, Brother Eusebius, I was not there!' he added piteously and earnestly.

'At the hour of six?' persisted the unbelieving Capuchin.

'I swear to you that at the hour of six I was, and had been for some time, in one of those unaccountable trances in which my uncle has the power to cast me—one of those hours of bodily torpor that have come upon me,' he added, while the perspiration

poured in bead-drops from his pallid brow. 'I awoke about eight. I heard the chimes ringing in the church of St. Giles, and near me sat my uncle, pen in hand, as if in the act of questioning me and committing to paper that which I had been revealing in my magnetic slumber. Oh! am I the victim of necromancy?'

'Scarcely, in this age of the world,' replied the Capuchin, but now with more of pity than rebuke in his manner.

'I swear to you by the Holy Blood that I speak the truth!' continued Hendrik, referring to the famous *relique* of the Brugois in the little chapel near the Hôtel de Ville. 'I last remember hearing the voice of my uncle as I sank into sleep; my arms fell powerless by my side; my eyes closed; waves of magnetic fluid or air seemed to flow over me; and my spirit passed away, at his behest, to other lands.'

'What madness—what raving is this, Hendrik?' said the sandalled friar, with sadness and severity. 'Do you mean to tell me that your uncle is another Cagliostro—a veritable Balsamo?'

'I fear it—I fear it,' said Hendrik, with clasped hands.

'Learn first to fear the potations of the *estaminet*,' replied the Capuchin, as he turned coldly and bluntly away, believing that the young man was intoxicated.

On another occasion Hendrik failed to keep an appointment with Lenora Van Eyck, who waited for him anxiously till long past the time named, and then proceeded pensively homeward. As she approached the steep and antique bridge that leads from the Rue des Augustines to the Quai Espagnol she saw Hendrik cross it, and look at her calmly and deliberately the while, but

without a glance or smile of recognition. Her heart, which at first had beat happily, now became perplexed as he turned abruptly up the opposite bank of the canal, and dropped into a little skiff, which he proceeded to unmoor, and, in doing so, cut his right hand severely.

'Hendrik! Hendrik!' she called aloud; but he heard her not, and, shipping a pair of sculls, pulled swiftly out of sight.

When next they met, and she upbraided him with this strange conduct, the same emotion of fear that had come over him when confronted by the Capuchin again filled his heart, and he called Heaven to witness that it was not he whom she had seen.

'But here, Hendrik, love, is the wound on your hand,' urged the astonished girl.

'I know not how I received it,' he moaned, 'though aware that a wound is there.'

'This passes all comprehension!' said Lenora mournfully. 'Oh! Hendrik, I thought a love like ours would never die; yet doubt and terror are destroying it now.'

Something like a sob came into Hendrik's throat, and through his clenched teeth he muttered hoarsely and fiercely—

'This kind of life—a double life, it would seem—cannot last for ever. Nothing does last for ever, and the end will come anon.' And as he spoke he fixed his moist and now hollow eyes as if on some distant horizon which he alone could see.

'Hendrik!—dearest Hendrik!' urged the girl soothingly, as she caressed his face between her soft and pretty hands, for her heart was full of alarm as well as love; it was a conviction so dreadful, the fear that he was perhaps becoming insane.

'Can over-study at Brussels have made the poor boy ill' thought Lenora, in the solitude of her chamber that night. 'Oh! must I give him up after all—after all? Dare I go through life as the wife of one so strange, so wayward, and so moody? No; better be a *béguine* like Aunt Truey. I am so happy at home. Why do girls marry? and for what do I want to marry?' And as she pondered thus, she sat looking at her white hands, and changing Hendrik's betrothal ring—an opal set with diamonds—from one finger to another, till it slipped from her and rolled away on the varnished floor, from whence she snatched it up with a little cry of alarm, for the event seemed ominous of evil. 'Oh, I must indeed consult Brother Eusebius about this matter,' was her concluding thought, more especially as the Capuchin had told her that 'opals were unlucky.'

And when he dropped in for his post-prandial cup of coffee with her mother that evening, Lenora did take him into her confidence; but the friar only imbibed pinch after pinch of snuff from the huge wooden box which he carried in the sleeve pocket of his brown frock; hinted of what he had seen at the *estaminet*, and shook his shaven head, adding that 'Hendrik Van Gansendonck came of a bad stock, and should be avoided.' So the Capuchin was consulted no more on the subject.

Hendrick now broke many appointments made with Lenora. He seemed to be no longer the master of his own actions, and he was so frequently reproached by her for his inattention and unkindness, that he feared to make a promise to her at all, and two entire days passed without their meeting.

Could he tell her that which he

now confidently believed to be the case; that Herr Van Gansendonck had cast him into a mesmeric trance, leaving him in that condition, and intending to come back in an hour or so; but, having been summoned away on business, had left him, to all appearance spell-bound and helpless, to the terror of the old housekeeper at the chateau?

On the third day he met her coming from vespers in the church of the *Béguinage*, where she had been to visit her Aunt Truey.

Lenora was very pale; her eyes were full of tears, and, as Hendrik could perceive, they were sparkling with resentment. She was in the very summer of her beauty—that age when all girls seem pretty. Hendrik gazed upon her caressingly, and would have kissed her, but the walk was a public one, and the *blanchisseurs* were busy amid the Minnewater. Lenora was so prettily dressed, too; and most suitably did her silver-grey costume, trimmed with rose-coloured ribbon, become her blonde beauty, her purity of complexion and fair shining tresses. Fresh, young, and graceful, there was a delicacy and softness in all her air and person, yet anger was apparent in her eyes; and those of Lenora were what a writer has described, as 'wonderful golden eyes—eyes which painters dare not imitate, because the colour is so subtle, and the light in them so living—eyes that are called hazel, but are not hazel.'

'I now know the reason of your avoiding me in the Rue des Augustines, and also where you were going on that evening in the skiff,' said she.

'Lenora, have I not already said——'

'Hendrik,' interrupted the girl, with severity, 'I have for some time feared that you were crazed; now

I find that you are wicked, and that Brother Eusebius was right after all.'

'Wicked—my darling!'

'Do not speak to me thus; I have good reason to be most indignant with you,' she continued, stamping her little foot on the ground.

'For what, dearest?' asked Hendrik, whose heart was sinking with vague apprehension as usual.

'Cease to twist your moustache, and answer me this: was it right or proper of you to be drinking with soldiers at the Rampart de Caserne last evening?—and worse still, to be toying with and caressing little Mademoiselle Dentelle, the lace-maker, who lives there—toying with her actually in the open street, while mamma and I passed you?' added Lenora, whose eyes were flashing through their tears, though her cheek was pale, as Hendrik's now became.

He was voiceless, and could make neither response or reply, for he knew that at the time to which she referred he had been, as he simply phrased it, 'put to sleep in his kinsman's study,' and that on awaking he had found himself *not* there, but lying on the grassy bank near the Rampart de Caserne, and that, instead of his hat, he found on his head the kepi of a soldier of the 2nd Regiment, then quartered in Bruges, and a pipe, of which he knew nothing, dangling from a button of his coat! The stars were shining, and the dew was on the grass, but how long he had been there, or how he came to be there, were alike mysteries to him.

He felt bitterly the utter hopelessness of urging more to Lenora; yet he attempted to falter out some explanation.

'This is juggling, Hendrik,' replied the girl passionately; 'another face—another love has

come between us, otherwise you would not dare to treat me thus!'

'Your suspicion is false, dearest Lenora,' said he. 'Oh, pardon me, sweet one! but I feel as if I were in a dream—as if I were some one else, and not myself!'

'Again, dreams!' said Lenora scornfully, as she drew his betrothal ring from her finger, dashed it at his feet, and left him. Night after night had Lenora lain awake, brooding over the change that had come upon Hendrik, weeping the while, with wide-open eyes in the darkness, and now she had come to the firm resolution to dismiss him for ever; but when she left him, silent, stunned, and confounded by the Minnewater, her heart yearned for him again, and she repented her severity, lest his mind might be, as she too justly feared, affected.

And now he, while gazing wistfully after her retiring figure, thought with loathing and horror of the keen visage, the hawk-like nose, the cold, yet clear glittering eyes and gold spectacles of that odious relative to whom he was unhappily indebted even for food and raiment, for his past education, and all his future prospects in life—Lenora included; but who seemed to possess over him a power so unaccountable, so terrible and diabolical! Much of this he said to one or two friends whom he met on his way homeward, and the expressions were also remembered against him in the time that was to come.

Soon after he found himself secretly and imperatively summoned to the presence of the Herr, who—as he afterwards told the Burgomaster in the Palais de Justice—'bade him go sleep,' and sent his spirit on some mysterious errand, hundreds of miles away. What happened in the library of that lonely little chateau outside the

Porte St. Croix, while his spiritual essence was thus absent, the unhappy Hendrik never could know; but when it re-entered his body—or when he awoke—he was horrified to find his learned uncle lying dead on the floor amid a pool of blood, his face and throat gashed by dreadful wounds, which had evidently been inflicted by a blood-spotted knife which Hendrik found clutched in *his own right hand!* Blood gouts were over all his clothes, the pockets of which were found to be stuffed with money, jewels, and other valuables taken from a bureau and desk, which had been burst open and ransacked.

The soul of Hendrik died within him! Even if he had committed this crime in frenzy—and he felt certain that he did not do so—why should he have sought to rob his uncle? He then thought of Lenora, and of the sorrow and shame that would come upon her now; he reeled and fell senseless on the floor. The cries of the old housekeeper speedily brought aid; Hendrik was arrested, charged with assassination and robbery, and was at once consigned, as already described, to the Palais de Justice, where all the weird story came to light. The hatred and horror he had expressed of his dead uncle were now remembered fatally by all who had heard them; but the knife he had in his hand was, sin-

gularly enough, found to be the property of a soldier of the 2nd Belgian Infantry.

To the last Hendrik asserted his innocence, when tried and convicted for that which was, not unnaturally, deemed a most cruel and ungrateful crime; and his advocate, Père Baas, who, singularly enough, was also a dabbler in mesmerism, laboured hard in his cause, but in vain. When brought to the scaffold in the Grande Place, Hendrik, attended by Brother Eusebius, had all the bearing of a martyr, as he fully believed that the crime committed, if by his hand, was at least by the dictate of another spirit.

Lenora visited him in the dreary cell the night before he died, and, according to 'La Patrie,' as they parted, Hendrik said:

'Death, even on the scaffold, has no terror for me now. I know where my spirit will go, and that none on earth can recall it. You will come to me, beloved Lenora,' he added, pointing upwards; 'you will come to me there in heaven, where there can be no parting, no death, and no sorrow.'

And, with one long embrace, they parted for ever.

The editor of 'La Patrie,' writing of these things next day, said, not without truth, 'Hendrik Van Gansendonck was, too probably, crazed; and if so, should not have been executed.'

JAMES GRANT.



GUBMUM.

READER! is this world big enough for you? Can you draw a free, manly breath 'neath the lowly arch that oppresses you o'erhead? Are you content to exist for ever within the puny circle defined for you by an arbitrary and imperfect system of astronomy?

Sink through the earth. You cannot: the antipodes are beneath the surface, and you are stopped—breast-high. Soar aloft. You dare not: lest you derange the solar system. Alas! how can you escape?

* * * * *

Diagonally.

* * * * *

It was a dark, cheerless winter's morning. Snow was on the ground, hoar-frost on the window-panes. I was awakened by a dull, ominous presage of Something, pressing on my congested brain. My hip-bath stared me in the face. I shuddered—but it must be done. I crept out of bed, and paused irresolute. It was bitterly cold! The presage was still there. Suddenly, I rushed to the fire-place, snatched up the massive poker, flew back to the bath, and, with one mighty blow, dashed the solid ice into a million fragments.

Then—then—(oh, reader!)—I plunged in.

The majesty of the shock obliterated consciousness. For the trillionth of a second I was dead—dead to all save the presage—which lowered upon the troubled bosom of my oblivion in a manner peculiar to such visitations. Then—mercy!—I was violently dismembered, and fractionally impelled, with a frightful velocity, along a rigid diagonal line, stretched from the uttermost confines of concep-

tion to—to—(be still, my panting soul!)—to GUBMUM!

* * * * *

I found myself on a low mossy bank, looking helplessly upon my fragments. My head, body, legs, and arms were lying around in picturesque confusion. Still, strange to say, I felt no pain. The presage was gone, and a peaceful, uninquiring calm had settled on my head. Nor did my other portions manifest any inconvenience.

I was but mortal, however; and after we had remained like this for a few minutes, my brain began to experience monotony, and conceived an earnest desire for a new excitement.

On that instant, we all flew into space!

I mysteriously understood from this, that I ought to wish *the other way*. I did so, and *presto*—we all flew together again! I was an integral man once more.

I rose, shook myself, spoke a few words aloud (to guard against dreams), and took a long, discriminating look around me.

I was in a beautiful meadow, with all the poetical appurtenances, and a broad, shining river running past me into the illimitable perspective. There were several little points about this landscape which struck me as peculiar.

I noticed that the trees grew with their roots in the air, and the foliage (if there was any) underground. There was an immense variety of charming flowers embedded in the ground, with their closely ramified stalks sticking out. The river ran five feet above its banks; so that, when I stood by its edge, the water was as high as my neck; and by stooping a little I could see the fish

swimming about; still it did not overflow. I say, these things struck me as rather odd at first; but it is astonishing how quickly one gets used to remarkable sights!

I walked about the meadow for some time, and amused myself with digging up the various sorts of fruit which I saw peeping out of the ground. The apples were especially juicy.

Now, I was always fond of this fruit; and, with such abundance as I saw around, I could not help indulging rather freely. I had eaten five large, red, luscious fellows, and was half-way through the sixth, when suddenly I experienced a very remarkable feeling. I felt getting lighter! There was no doubt about it: a pleasant, mild, exhilaration was soon followed by an actual physical loss of weight. I could hardly put my feet on the ground as I walked along: I stamped as heavily as I could, but no mark was left on the grass; and in a few minutes more, just as I completed my sixth apple, I positively flew into the air! With a velocity, to which that of lightning is trivial and uninteresting, I shot upwards with an ever-increasing impetus. Being totally unused to such things, I shrieked with terror: the immediate effect of which was to materially increase my speed. Then, like magic, all my fears vanished, and I felt a marvellous sensation of dreamy pleasure floating o'er my soul. I laughed aloud, and eagerly strove to go faster.

A huge net was at once flung over me, and I was dragged violently to the ground.

Oh! the impotence of human wishes in this marvellous place!

After an interval of oblivion, I recovered my senses, wriggled out of the net, and sat up. Bending over me was a man, scowling

furiously, with his arm uplifted as if thirsting for my life. And yet, strange to relate, I felt no alarm. I smiled pleasantly, and made some unimportant remark about the weather. He fled as if Death had been after him, and I was once more alone.

I then found that a couple of enormous weights had been tied to my ankles, and I could not get up. So I sat still.

Presently, a whole army of men approached, headed by him I had first seen. They were all smiling most affably, and seemed perfectly delighted to see me. All at once, the leader drew a sort of horse-pistol from his belt, and pointed it straight at my head. I was in a great fright; but, thinking to intimidate him, I put on a fearful frown and shook my head fiercely. Back went the pistol to its belt, and the mob returned my scowl with interest. I was on the point of giving myself up for lost, when, by a peculiar species of intuition, for which I need hardly account, I comprehended that in this wonderful country frowns meant friendship, and smiles slaughter. So I continued to look furious; and presently one of them handed me a bowl of something remarkably like milk. I took it; and, strange to say, it didn't disagree with the apples. Warned by previous experience, I continued to frown horribly; and in less time than it takes to tell it, I was comfortably housed in the residence of the chief magistrate of Gubmuh.

The first thing I had to do was to learn the language.

In a short narrative of this description it is unnecessary for me to state minutely *how* I did it; nor can I, without tiring the reader, go into a discussion as to its origin, etymology, &c.; although these are exceedingly curious, and in-

terested me much at the time. Therefore, when I represent any one as saying anything, in this history, it must be distinctly understood that I have translated it from pure Gubmuhghese.

During my stay at the house of the chief magistrate of Gubmuh, I had abundant opportunities of contemplating the manners and customs of the people. My host was an agreeable, well-educated man, whose liberal and enlightened mind prompted him not to trouble about my antecedents; and he took my sudden appearance in the realms of Gubmuh as an everyday affair, requiring neither comment nor explanation. This saved me a vast amount of troublesome cross-examination, which would have been as tedious to read as relate. I found that he was what we should call a philosopher; and spent all his spare time in trying to 'account for' things. He was well versed in the history of Gubmuh; which is handed down by tradition from father to son, and presents many features of interest. Unlike the history of other countries, it contains not a single battle. The successive kings came to the throne without any of those indecent struggles to be found in our history; and universal peace has reigned ever since the first woman;—for the Gubmuhghese affirm that Adam was an afterthought.

My host was also learned in physical science; and told me that the reason why everybody wore weights round their ankles was, that the centre of gravity of Gubmuh was situate a couple of million miles *above* the earth; and taking me into the back yard, he kindly showed it to me. It was a small black ball in the centre of the heavens, in the exact place that (with us) the sun occupies at noon. By-the-by, there is no sun

at Gubmuh, the place being lighted on a highly ingenious principle, hitherto undiscovered.

The centre of gravity thus being outside the earth, my host assured me that it was easy to see why everything grew topsyturvy in Gubmuh; and, for further information on this interesting subject, I would refer the reader to the 'Edinburgh Encyclopædia,' letter G, art. *Gravity*.

The government of Gubmuh is an absolute monarchy, and the king is therefore not allowed to marry. He has unlimited authority over the whole population, and never abuses it. In fact, the politics of Gubmuh may be studied with great advantage.

It is a curious fact, which may, perhaps, be accounted for by the peculiar position of the centre of gravity—that, in Gubmuh, everybody says 'yes' when he means 'no,' and *vice versa*. They look angry when they are pleased, and smile sweetly when in a passion. This rather confused me at first, but I soon got accustomed to it; and, being anxious to be thought as affable as possible, during my stay, I contracted a steady scowl which defies obliteration, and has done me incalculable injury since my return.

One of the most striking peculiarities of Gubmuh is, that nobody has a *name* there. No one is called anything whatever; which saves an extraordinary amount of trouble in the long run. If they wish to allude to any one, they approach him and touch him gently on the shoulder; if he is not present at the time, they cheerfully postpone their remarks: which, after all, is a very rational way of doing things. I cannot help wishing—but no matter: I am in other climes just now.

I must not forget to speak of their system of marriage. The women

are, without a single exception, beautiful: the men, remarkably hideous. As with us, the women are considered minutely inferior to the men, and therefore hold the place of honour amongst them! They enjoy every luxury that the cheerful self-sacrifice of the men can afford: they are treated with the most tender respect, and their slightest wish is consulted, and, when practicable, promptly gratified. The men work, that the women may live at ease; and regard their toil but as a precious means of gaining one feminine smile: the men devotedly love—the women graciously allow it; and yet there are no Woman's Rights in Gubmuh.

When you love a fair Gubmuh-gee, you are supposed to love all the family for her sake; therefore, you must *marry the house*, as it is called, and this includes any one who happens to be inside on the wedding morning. I cannot help thinking that the Mormons must have got some of their ideas from Gubmuh.

After I had been some little time a guest of the chief magistrate, I had an opportunity of seeing something of the laws of Gubmuh. I was thrown into prison for some trifling offence (I forget what it was, now), and shortly afterwards brought up for trial. I was much struck by the appearance of the Court. The judge, instead of being elevated above the counsel, audience, and witnesses, as in this country, sat in a sort of well, in the middle of the floor, and put his head up through a trap-door when he wanted to say anything. The counsel wore tights, and had their heads shaved; and indeed, the practical sense of this arrangement cannot be too highly commended, for a variety of reasons which would be out of place here.

The jury consisted of two hundred householders; and the verdict of the *minority* was conclusive. The calm and impartial spirit which seemed to animate the whole proceedings was a lesson to every age and country. I was unanimously acquitted by one of the jury; and left the court, as the judge declared, 'without a particle of virtue in my character.'

If we could only imitate—but I am digressing.

On my return to the house of the chief magistrate, his second daughter came up to me, and said, 'You brute!—I'm so sorry you've got off!'

'Vulgar minx,' I returned, with a low bow, 'if you please.' (The reader understands that this meant *thank you*.)

Then her father approached, with a furious look, and said, 'I trust that we shall soon see the last of *you*—you miscreant!'

'You are intolerably disagreeable!' said I, pulling his nose violently; for they never shake hands in Gubmuh.

Then we sat down to *fill ourselves*; an operation which bears some resemblance to dining, with us. A pleasant family party we were! My place was next to the second daughter, and I was happy. Why should I disguise it—in so short a sketch as this? I was violently in love with her. It would hardly be possible to go through adventures of this kind without falling in love with somebody; the only difficulty, and the one which most painfully beset me, was—how the deuce was it all to end?

Many a weary midnight hour did I pass in thinking this over. At last—glorious inspiration!—I hit upon a plan for carrying off my beloved (without the formality of *marrying the house*), and retiring with pleasing precipitancy

to my native land, where I determined to substitute warm baths for cold, and live happily ever afterwards!

I found her in the garden, digging up grapes. I approached her softly, and clasped her in my arms.

'Clutch me tighter!' she cried, hysterically.

'You hag!' breathed I into her ear, 'I hate you! Ever since I first beheld your stunted figure, and heard your nasal twang, I have loathed the very sight of you. I would not marry you for millions!'

Overpowered by the usual feelings, she slapped my face, pulled my hair, and bit a piece out of my finger.

Joy! it was mutual!

I led her to a convenient arbour close by, and we sat down.

'You virulent shrew,' said I, in a fierce tone, 'don't point your squint eyes at me!' for she bashfully averted her gaze from mine; 'the question is—and I dare you to prevaricate—will you marry me or not?'

Then it came.

'Vicious beast,' she hissed, through her beautiful teeth, 'my soul abhors your very being!'

'Angel!' I shouted, but instantly corrected myself—'let us not stir hence!' and, snatching her up in my arms, I rushed to a convenient spot, cut the cords which kept the weights to our respective ankles, and next minute we were flying up into the heavens at the rate of a hundred miles an hour!

It was delicious! The pure, clear atmosphere bathed us in its dewy radiance, the azure heavens smiled serene approval on our

courage and devotion, the picturesque beauties of Gubmuh sank rapidly to rest beneath our eager feet, while above—good gracious!—the centre of gravity!

* * * * *

How we escaped I know not. I fancied I felt a sort of jerking bump; but my first thought was for my beloved, who lay, apparently in a stupor, at my feet. I lifted her up, and took her to a small farm-house which happened to be at hand; where she was put to bed and tenderly nursed until she had quite recovered.

We were married at once, by special licence; and took modest but comfortable apartments, in which we have lived happily ever since.

Oh the boon of a true, loving wife!

* * * * *

NOTE.—I have been somewhat annoyed by certain persons, who have asserted that there are several points in this narrative which require explanation. They want to know *how I was dressed* when I found myself on the mossy bank in Gubmuh; they maintain that the farm-house to which I carried my fainting bride is not sufficiently accounted for; and, lastly, they [desire to be informed *where I am now*. I regret that I can give no public reply to these questions; but I shall be happy to communicate personally with any one who takes a *bond fide* interest in my discovery, and who will volunteer to join a projected expedition to Gubmuh, which is arranged for next summer. Advertisements will shortly appear in all the leading journals.

J. G. M.

THE VEILED PORTRAIT.

BY JAMES GRANT.

IT has been asserted that one cannot hold intercourse with that which is generally called the Unseen World, or behold anything supernatural, and live; but these ideas, from my own experience, I am inclined to doubt.

In the year subsequent to the great Bengal mutiny, I found myself at home on sick leave. My health had been injured by service in India, and by our sufferings consequent on the revolt; while my nervous system had been so seriously shaken by a grape-shot wound received at Lucknow, that it was completely changed, and I became cognisant of many things so utterly new to me, and so bewildering, that until I read Baron Reichenbach's work on magnetism and crystalism, I feared that I was becoming insane. I was sensible of the power of a magnet over me, though it might be three rooms distant, and twice, in darkness which seemed perfect to others, my room became filled with light; but the Baron holds that darkness is full of light, and that to increase the sensitiveness of the visual organs is to render that rare and dissipated light susceptible, with all that it may contain.

I was now compelled to acknowledge the existence of that new power in nature which the Baron calls the Odic Light, and of many other phenomena that are described in 'Der Geist in der Natur,' of Christian Oersted—the understanding that pervades all things.

But to my story.

Nearly a year had elapsed since the mutiny. The massacres at Delhi, Lucknow, Cawnpore, and elsewhere had been fearfully avenged by that army of retribution which marched from Umbal-

lah, and I found myself in London, enfeebled, enervated, and, as the saying is, 'weak as a child.' The bustle of the great capital stunned and bewildered me; thus I gladly accepted a hearty invitation which I received from Sidney Warren, one of 'ours,' but latterly of the Staff Corps, to spend a few weeks—months if I chose—at his place in Herts; a fine old house of the Tudor times, approached from the London road by an avenue that was a grand triumphal arch of nature's own creation, with lofty interlacing boughs and hanging foliage.

Who, thought I, that was lord of such a place could dream of broiling in India—of sweltering in the white-washed barrack at Dumdum, or the thatched cantonments of Delhi or Meerut!

My friend came hurrying forth to meet me.

'How goes it, old fellow? Welcome to my new quarters,' he exclaimed.

'Well, Sidney, old man, how are you?'

Then we grasped each other's hands as only brother soldiers do.

I found Warren, whom I had not seen since the commencement of the revolt, nearly as much changed and shattered in constitution as myself; but I knew that he had lost those whom he loved most in the world amid the massacre at Meerut. He received me, however, with all the warmth of an old comrade, for we had a thousand topics in common to converse over; while the regiment, which neither of us might ever see again—he certainly not, as he had sold out—would prove an endless source of conversation.

Sidney Warren was in his

fortieth year, but looked considerably older. His once dark hair and coal-black moustache were quite grizzled now. The expression of his face was one of intense sadness, as if some secret grief consumed him; while there was a weird and far-seeing expression that led me to fear he was not fated to be long in this world. Yet he had gone through the storm of the Indian war without receiving even a scratch! Why was this?

Before I had spent two days with Sidney, he had shown me all the objects of interest around the Warren and in it—the portrait gallery, with its courtiers in high ruffs, and dames in the long stomachers of one period and *décolletée* dresses of another; his collection of Indian antiquities, amassed at the plundering of Delhi; and those which were more interesting to me, ponderous suits of mail which had been hacked and battered in the wars of the Roses, and a torn pennon unfurled by Warren's troop of horse, 'for God and the King,' at Naseby.

But there was one object which he would neither show nor permit me to look upon, and which seemed to make him shiver or shudder whenever it caught his eye, and this was a picture of some kind in the library—a room he very rarely entered. It was the size of a life-portrait, but covered closely by a green-baize hanging. Good taste compelled me to desist from talking to him on the subject, but I resolved to gratify my curiosity on the first convenient occasion; so one day when he was absent at the stable court I drew back the hanging of this mysterious picture.

It proved to be the full-length portrait of a very beautiful girl—a proud and stately one, too—bordering on blooming womanhood. Her features were clearly cut and

classic; she had an olive-coloured complexion, that seemed to tell of another land than England, yet the type of her rare beauty was purely English. Her forehead was broad and low; her dark eyes, that seemed to haunt and follow me, were deeply set, with black brows well defined; her chin was rather massive, as if indicating resolution of character, yet the soft, ripe lips were full of sweetness; while the gorgeous coils of her dark hair were crisp and wavy. Her attire was a green riding-habit, the skirt of which was gathered in her left hand, while the right grasped the bridle of her horse.

It was *not* a portrait of his wife, whom I remember to have been a fair-haired little woman; so *who* was this mysterious lady? I cannot describe the emotion this portrait excited within me; but I started and let fall the curtain, with a distinct sensation of some one, or *something* I could not see, being close beside me; so I hurried from the shady library into the sunshine. Lovely though the face—I can see it yet in all its details—it haunted me with an unpleasant pertinacity, impossible either to analyse or portray. But I was a creature of fancies then.

'Herein,' thought I, 'lurks some mystery, which may never be cleared up to me.' But in this surmise I was wrong, for one night—the night of Sunday, the 10th May, the first anniversary of the outbreak at Meerut, after we had discussed an excellent dinner, with a bottle or two of Moselle, and betaken us to iced brandy *pawnee* (for so we still loved to call it), and to the 'soothing weed,' on the sofas of the smoking-room, Warren became suddenly seized by one of those confidential fits which many men unaccountably have at such times, and, while he unsparingly and bitterly reproached himself for the

part he had acted in it, I drew from him, little by little, the secret story of his life.

Some ten years before those days of which I write, when in the Guards, and deeply dipped in debt by extravagance, he had, unknown to his family, married secretly a beautiful girl who was penniless, at the very time his friends were seeking to retrieve his fortune by a wealthy alliance. An exchange into the Line—'the sliding scale'—became necessary, thus he was gazetted to our regiment in India, at a period when his young wife was in extremely delicate health; so much so that the idea of her voyaging round the Cape—there were no P. and O. Liners then—was not to be thought of, as it was expressly forbidden by the medical men; so they were to be separated for a time; and that time of parting, so dreaded by Constance, came inexorably.

The last fatal evening came—the last Sidney was to spend with her. His strapped overlands and bullock-trunks, his sword and cap, both cased, were already in the entrance hall; the morrow's morning would see him off by the train for Southampton, and his place would be vacant; and she should see his fond hazel eyes no more.

'Tears again!' said he, almost impatiently, while tenderly caressing the dark and glossy hair of his girl-wife; 'why on earth are you so sad, Conny, about this temporary separation?'

'Would that I could be certain it is only such!' she exclaimed. 'Sad; oh, can you ask me, Sidney, darling? The presentiment of a great sorrow to come is hanging over me.'

'A presentiment, Constance! Do not indulge in this folly.'

'If I did not love you dearly, Sidney, would such a painful emotion rack my heart?'

'It is the merest superstition, darling, and you will get over it when I am fairly away.'

Her tender eyes regarded him wistfully for a moment, and then her tears fell faster at the contemplation of the coming loneliness.

After a pause, she asked:

'Are there many passengers going out with you?'

'A few—in the cuddy,' he replied carelessly.

'Do you know any of them?'

'Yes; one or two fellows on the staff.'

'And the ladies?' she asked, after another pause.

'I don't know, Conny dear; what do they matter to me?'

'I heard incidentally that—that Miss Dashwood was going out in your vessel.'

'Indeed; I believe she will.'

Constance shivered, for with the name of this finished flirt that of her husband had been more than once linked, and his change of colour was unseen by her as he turned to manipulate a cigar. So for four, perhaps six months, these two would be together upon the sea.

Constance knew too well the irritable nature of her husband's temper to say more on the subject of her secret thoughts; and deeply loth was she that such ideas should embitter the few brief hours they were to be together now; so a silence ensued, which, after a time, she broke, while taking between her slender fingers a hand of Sidney, who was leaning half moodily, half listlessly against the mantelpiece, twisting his moustache with a somewhat mingled expression of face.

'Sidney, darling,' said she entreatingly, 'do forgive me if I am dull and sad—so *triste*—this evening.'

'I do forgive you, little one.'

'You know, Sidney, that I would die for you!'

'Yes; but don't, Conny—for I hate scenes,' said he, playfully kissing her sweetly sad, upturned face; and the poor girl was forced to be contented with this matter-of-fact kind of tenderness.

So the dreaded morrow came with its sad moment of parting.

To muffle the sound of the departing wheels she buried her head, with all its wealth of dark, dishevelled hair, among the pillows of her bed, and some weeks—weeks of the most utter loneliness, elapsed, ere she left it, with the keen and ardent desire to recover health and strength, to the end that she might follow her husband over the world of waters and rejoin him; but the strength and health, so necessary for the journey, were long of coming back to her.

She had hoped he would write her before sailing from Southampton—a single line would have satisfied the hungry cravings of her heart; but, as he did not do so, she supposed there was not time; yet the transport lay three days in the docks after the troops were on board. He would write by some passing ship, he had said, and one letter, dated from Ascension, reached her; but its cold and careless tone struck a mortal chill to the sensitive heart of Constance, and one or two terms of endearment it contained were manifestly forced and ill-expressed.

'He writes me thus,' she muttered, with her hand pressed upon her heaving bosom; 'thus—and with that woman, perhaps, by his side!'

She consulted the map, and saw how far, far away on the lonely ocean was that island speck. Months had elapsed since he had been there; so she knew that he must be in India now, and she

had the regular mails to look to with confidence—a confidence, alas! that soon faded away. Long, tender, and passionate was the letter she wrote in reply; she fondly fixed the time when she proposed to leave England and rejoin him, if he sent her the necessary remittances; but mail after mail came in without any tidings from Sidney, and she felt all the unspeakable misery of watching the postman for letters that never, never came!

Yet she never ceased to write, entreating him for answers and assuring him of unswerving affection.

Slowly, heavily, and imperceptibly a year passed away—a whole year—to her now a black eternity of time!

'Could Sidney be dead?' she asked herself with terror; but she knew that his family (who were all unaware of *her* existence) had never been in mourning, as they must infallibly have been in the event of such a calamity; and in her simplicity she never thought of applying to the Horse Guards for information concerning him—more information than she might quite have cared to learn.

Her old thoughts concerning Miss Dashwood took a strange hold of her imagination now; a hundred 'trifles light as air' came back most gallingly to memory and took coherent and tangible shapes; but a stray number of the 'Indian Mail' informed her of the marriage of Miss Dashwood—her *déte-noire*—to a Major Milton; and also that the regiment to which Sidney belonged 'was moving up country,' a phrase to her perplexing and vague.

Her funds were gone—her friends were few and poor. Her jewels—his treasured presents—were first turned into cash; then the furniture of her pretty villa, and next the villa itself with its sweet rose-

garden, had to be exchanged for humbler apartments in a meaner street; and, ere long, Constance Warren found, that if she was to live, it must be by her own unaided efforts; and for five years she maintained a desperate struggle for existence—five years!

A lady going to India 'wanted a young person as a governess and companion.'

To India—to India! On her knees Constance prayed that her application might prove successful; and her prayer was heard, for out of some hundred letters—from a few which were selected—the tenor of hers suited best the taste of the lady in question. She said nothing of her marriage or of her apparent desertion; but as her wedding ring, which, with a fond superstition of the heart, she never drew from her finger, told a tale, she had to pass for a widow.

So in the fulness of time she found herself far away from England, and duly installed with an Anglo-Indian family in one of the stately villas of the European quarter of Calcutta—a veritable palace in the city of palaces, overlooking the esplanade before Fort William—in charge of one sickly, but gentle little pale-faced girl.

She had been a month there when her employer's family proposed to visit some relatives at Meerut, where she heard that Sidney's regiment was cantoned! To her it seemed as if the hand of Fate was in all this. Oh the joy of such tidings! Some one there must be able to unravel the horrible mystery involving his fate; for by this time she had ascertained that his name was out of the corps; but her heart suggested that he might have exchanged into another.

'If alive, is he worth caring for?' She often asked this of herself, but thrust aside the idea, and

pursued with joy the long journey up country by river steamers, dawk-boats, and otherwise, on the Ganges to Jehangeerabad, from whence they were to travel by carriages to the place of their destination, some fifty miles distant.

On the way Constance had an addition to her charge in the person of a little boy, who, with his *ayah*, was going to join his parents at Meerut. This little boy was more than usually beautiful, with round and dimpled cheeks, dark hazel eyes, curly golden hair, and a sweet and winning smile. Something in the child's face or its expression attracted deeply the attention of Constance, and seemed to stir some memory in her heart. Where had she seen those eyes before?

She drew the boy caressingly towards her, and when kissing his fair and open forehead, her eyes fell involuntarily on a ring that secured his necktie, a mere blue riband. It was of gold, and on it were graven the initials C. and S. with a lover's knot between. These were those of herself and her husband, and the ring was one she had seen him wear daily. Constance trembled in every limb; she felt a deadly paleness overspread her face, and the room in which she sat swam round her; but on recovering her self-possession, she said:

'Child, let me look at this ring.'

The wondering boy placed in her hand the trinket, which she had not the slightest doubt of having seen years before in London.

'Who gave you this, my child?' she asked.

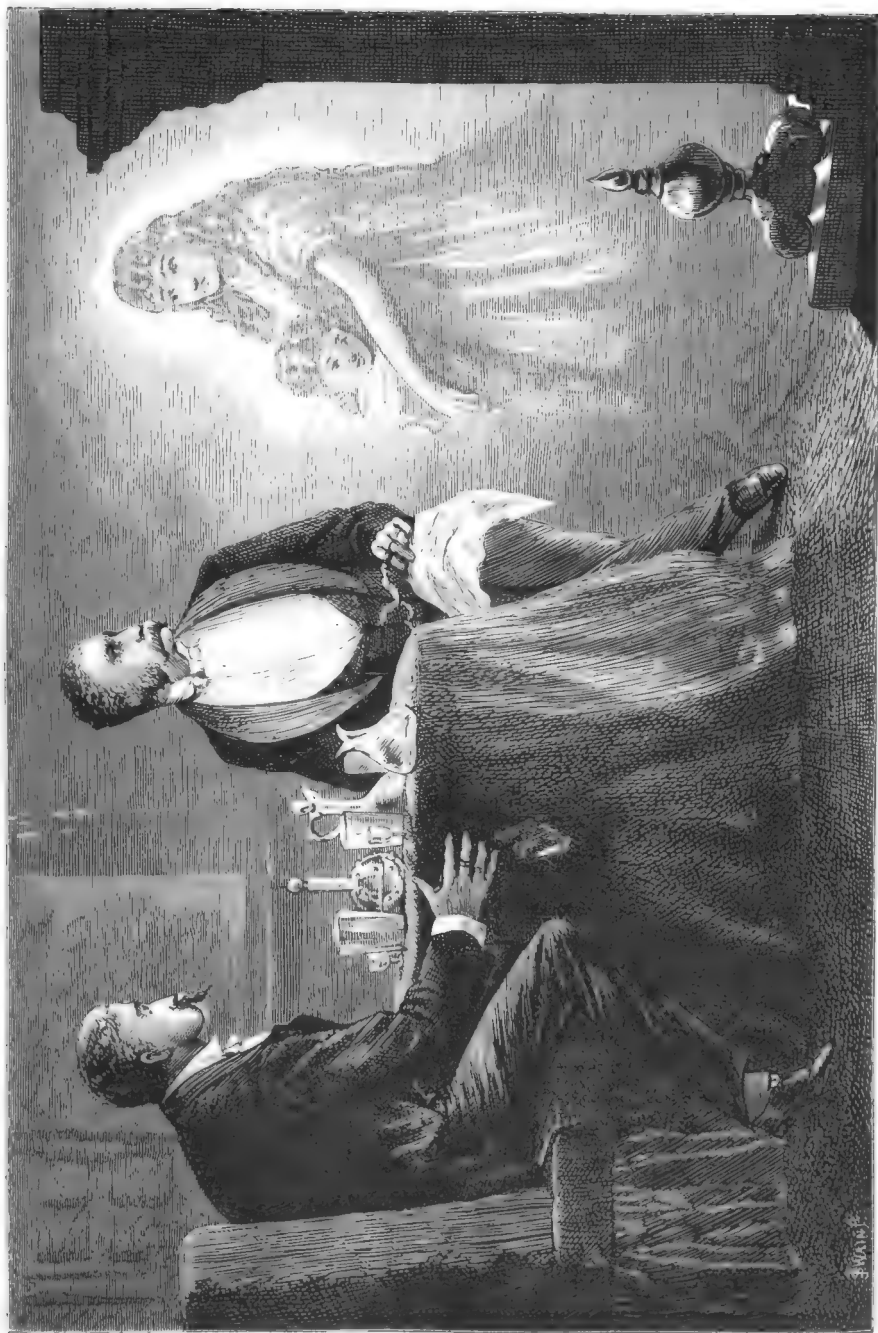
'My papa.'

'Your papa!—what is your name?'

'Sidney.'

'What else?' she asked impetuously.

'Sidney Warren Milton.'



Drawn by Geo. Cruikshank, jun.]

THE VEILED PORTRAIT.

“‘Constance and my child,’ cried Sidney.”

'Thank God! But how came you to be named so? There is some mystery in this—a mystery that must soon be solved now. Where were you born, dear little Sidney?'

'In Calcutta.'

'What is your age, child?'

'Next year, I shall be seven years old.'

'Seven—how strange it is that you have the name you bear!'

'It is my papa's,' said the boy, with a little proud irritability of manner.

'Where did your papa live before he came to Calcutta?'

'I don't know—in many places—soldiers always do.'

'He is a soldier?'

'My papa is Major Milton, and lives in the cantonments at Meerut.'

'A little time, and I shall know all,' replied poor Constance, caressing the boy with great tenderness.

On arriving at Meerut, however, she found herself ill—faint and feverish, so that for days she was confined to her bed, where she lay wakeful by night, watching the red fire-flies flashing about the green jealousies, and full of strange, wild dreams by day. She had but one keen and burning desire—to see Major Milton, and to learn from his lips the fate of her husband. On the evening of the fifth day—the evening of the 10th of May—she was lying on her pillow, watching the red sunshine fading on the ruined mosques, and Abu's stately tomb, when just as the sunset gun pealed over the cantonments, the *ayah* brought her a card, inscribed, 'Major Milton—Staff Corps.'

'Desire the Major to come to me!' said Constance in a broken voice, and terribly convulsed by emotion; for now she was on the eve of knowing all.

'Here to the *mehm sahib's* bedside?' asked the astonished *ayah*.

'Here instantly—go—go!'

Endued with new strength, as the woman withdrew, she sprang from her bed, put on her slippers, threw round her an ample cashmere dressing robe, and seated herself in a bamboo chair, trembling in every fibre. In a mirror opposite she could see that her face was as white as snow. The door was opened.

'Major Milton,' said a voice that made her tremble, and attired in undress uniform, pith-helmet in hand, her husband, looking scarcely a day older, stood gazing at her in utter bewilderment. He gave one convulsive start, and then stood rooted to the spot; but no expression or glance of tenderness escaped him. His whole aspect bore the impress of terror.

Years had elapsed as a dream, and they were again face to face, those two, whom no man might put asunder. Softness, sorrow, and reproach faded from the face of Constance. Her broad, low forehead became stern; her deep-set, dark eyes sparkled perilously, her full lips became set, and her chin seemed to express more than ever, resolution.

'Oh, Constance—Constance,' he faltered, 'I know not what to say!'

'It may well be so, Sidney' (and at the utterance of his name her lips quivered). 'So *you* are Major Milton, and the supposed husband of Miss Dashwood?'

There was a long pause, after which she said:

'I ask not the cause of your most cruel desertion; but whence this name of Milton?'

'A property was left me—and—but of course, you have long since ceased to love me, Constance?'

'You actually dare to take an upbraiding tone to me!' she exclaimed, her dark eyes flashing fire. Then looking upward appealingly, she wailed, 'Oh, my God! my God! and *this* is the man for whom, during these bitter years, I have been eating my own heart!'

'Pardon me, Constance; you may now learn that there is no gauge to measure the treachery of which the human heart in its weakness is capable. Yet there has been a worm in mine that has never died.'

She wrung her hands, and then said, with something of her old softness of manner:

'You surely loved me once, Sidney?'

'I did.' He drew nearer, but she recoiled from him.

'Then whence this cruel change?'

'Does not some one write, that we love, and think we love truly, and yet find another to whom one will cling as if it required these two hearts to make a perfect whole?'

'Most accursed sophistry! But if you have no pity, have you not fear?'

'I have great fear,' said he in a broken voice; 'thus, Constance, by the love you once bore me, I beseech you to have pity, not on me, but on my little boy, and his poor mother—preserve their happiness—'

'And sacrifice my own?' said she in a hollow voice.

'Spare, and do not expose me—my commission—my position here—'

'Neither shall be lost through me,' she replied, in a voice that grew more and more weak; 'but leave me—leave me—the air is suffocating—the light has left my eyes. Farewell, Sidney—kiss your child, for my sake.'

He drew near to take her hand,

but she repulsed him with a wild gesture of despair, and throwing up her arms, fell back in her seat, with a gurgle in her throat, her head on one side and her jaw fallen.

'Dead—quite dead!' was his first exclamation, and with his terror was blended a certain selfish emotion of satisfaction and relief at his escape. The blood again flowed freely in his veins, and he was roused by the cantonment *ghurries* clanging the hour of *nine*.

'Help—help!' cried he; but no help came, and as he hurried away, the sudden din of musket-shots, of shrieks and yells, announced that the great revolt had begun at Meerut, and that the expected massacre of the Europeans had commenced. In that butchery, those he loved most on earth perished, and midnight saw him, wifeless and childless, lurking in misery and alone in a mango tope, on the road to Kurnaul.

* * * * *

While listening to the narrative of my friend Sidney, whom I had always known as Warren, rather than Milton, the clock on the mantelpiece struck *nine*, and he said in a broken voice:

'It was at this very hour, twelve months ago, that my boy and his mother were murdered by the 3rd Cavalry, at the moment that Constance was dying!'

As he spoke, a strange white light suddenly filled one end of the smoking-room, and amid it there came gradually, but distinctly to view, two figures, one was a little boy with golden hair, the other a woman whose left arm was around him—a beautiful woman, with clearly-cut features, masses of dark hair curling over a low, broad forehead, lips full and handsome, with a massive chin and classic throat—the woman of

the veiled picture, line for line, but to all appearance living and breathing, with a beautiful smile in her eyes, and wearing, not the riding-habit, but a floating crape-like white garment, impossible to describe. There was a strange weird brightness in her face—the transfigured brightness of great joy and greater love.

‘Constance—Constance and my child!’ cried Sidney, in a voice that rose to a shriek; and like a dissolving view, the light, and all we looked on with eyes transfixed, faded away!

I was aware of an excess of sensitiveness, and that my heart was beating with painful rapidity. I did not become insensible, but some time elapsed before I became aware that lights were in the

room, and that several servants, whom my friend’s cry had summoned in haste and alarm, were endeavouring to rouse him to consciousness from a fit that had seized him; but from that fit he never recovered. His heavy stertorous breathing gradually grew less and less, and ere a doctor came, he had ceased to respire.

His death—sudden as hers on that eventful night, but a retributive one—was declared to be apoplexy; but I knew otherwise. Since then, though the effect of the grape-shot wound on my nervous system has quite passed away, I feel myself compelled to agree with the hackneyed remark of Hamlet, that ‘there are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in our philosophy.’



‘THAWING.’

THE PIERCED HEART.

BY CAPTAIN MAYNE REID.

SOMETHING less than a quarter of a century ago, the quiet sea-side town of E—— experienced a sensation startling as horrible. The sexton of the parish church, reopening a grave in which, several years before, a young girl had been buried, by some maladroit handling of his pickaxe, loosened the coffin lid. Curiosity impelling him to lift it and have a peep inside, he there saw what caused him to drop the half-decayed woodwork as if it had been hot iron, bound back out of the grave, and hurry off, hair on end. For, to his experienced eye, the position of the young girl's body showed she had been buried alive! Instead of lying on its back, as it must have been when interred, it was turned over on the left side, the knees bent to the full breadth of the coffin, the arms out of place, the right one raised to the head; while the hair was dishevelled and the shroud greatly disordered!

A circumstance so strange could not fail to create intense excitement in any neighbourhood—all the more in so quiet a one as that of E——. The scared gravedigger, hastening away from the weird spot, soon told his tale; which ran like wildfire throughout the town, spreading with like celerity over the adjacent district of country. From all parts rushed people towards E——, till a crowd was collected within its churchyard jamming it to the very gates.

Among those who yielded to the general attraction was a young lady of the name of Ingleworth; a rich heiress—not expectant, but in actual possession—who resided in the immediate neighbourhood.

Miss Ingleworth came in her landau, accompanied by a gentleman but little over her own age, though in no way related to her. But most who saw them knew he soon would be; for Captain Walton had proposed to the heiress, and been accepted. As the lady was entirely her own mistress—having no near relative save an invalid aunt, also a Miss Ingleworth, who resided with her—she could dispose as she pleased both of her hand and fortune; and she was about to bestow both on Captain Henry Walton.

As is customary among the country people—still deferent to their resident gentry—the crowd made way for the young lady and her escorting cavalier, permitting their approach to the newly-opened grave. By this time the coffin had been taken out, and rested on a tombstone near by—guarded by a couple of policemen, and encircled by the magisterial and other authorities of the town. And near by, also, was another coffin, a new one, fresh in its furniture of silver plates and crape knots, and surrounded by mutes and real mourners. It contained the corpse of the young girl's mother; the hour for the funeral having passed, and been for some time postponed on account of the startling and unexpected discovery. But, as this was no reason for further delaying the interment, it was decided that the second coffin should be lowered into the place from which the first had been lifted; the remains of the mother were to rest below those of her daughter, instead of, as originally intended, above them! It was an impressive scene; and

in that churchyard was many a moist eye, besides those of the weeping relatives.

As Miss Ingleworth stood by the coffin late disinterred, and saw the body, still in the position in which the sexton had found it—for no one had ventured to disturb it with what might have been deemed a sacrilegious touch—she was seen to start and turn pale; indeed, she became so faint as to require the arm of her betrothed on the way back to her carriage, to which she abruptly returned. On the drive home she expressed regret for having gone to the graveyard at all; while he, by way of rallying her, said in a cheering tone:

‘Pshaw! Helen! don’t think of the thing any more. Reflect only that the next time we two go together within those churchyard gates it will be for a more pleasant purpose. Twelve months; ah! how long it seems to wait. I’ve half a mind to give up soldiering, and, with your consent, bring it on a little sooner.’

This was in reference to their marriage—the date of which, with other matters appertaining, had been already arranged; though not the exact day, this depending on the young officer’s return from Malta, whither he was about to be sent on a twelve months’ tour of duty with his regiment, his departure to take place immediately. It was no thought of their separation that clouded the brow of his betrothed; nor did the melancholy smile with which she made reply to his bantering speech spring from anything he had said. The shadow had been there ever since gazing upon that ghastly spectacle in the churchyard; it haunted her not only for that day, but, at intervals, for all her life after—whenever she thought of it, sending a thrill of horror through her heart.

* * * * *

The year’s interregnum was about to expire, when Captain Walton, released from military duty, returned to England. Chivalrous and knightly as an ancient Crusader, he held his first salutation due to his ‘lady-love,’ and to her he was hastening. He knew she expected him; for, shortly before leaving Malta, he had written to her of his coming, and found her answer in the *poste restante* at Marseilles. But as he had been unable to fix the precise day, or hour, of reaching the E— terminus, on his arrival there no carriage was in waiting, and he engaged a fly to carry him on to Ingleworth House.

His route led him past the parish church, which stood a little way outside the town. As the hackney carriage bore him abreast of the churchyard wall, he looked over—curiosity directing his glance toward the spot where, twelve months before, he had stood by the grave in which the young girl had been buried alive. But before he could identify it, his eye was arrested by another, which caused him to start and command the fly-driver instantly to pull up. It was a new-made grave, inside a grand gilded railing, which he knew to be the family burying-place of the Ingleworths. Several slabs of white marble were lying within the inclosure—evidently the materials of a tomb about to be erected over it.

For a time his blood ran chill, his heart beating audibly. But only for an instant. Remembering the invalid aunt, he quickly recovered, saying to himself:

‘Ah! she’s dead. Pity, too; she was a good old soul, and always favoured my suit with her niece.’

‘Whose grave is that?’ he mechanically asked the sexton.

‘Which one, Captain?’ asked the man, recognising his interro-

gator, and deferentially raising his hat.

'That yonder—within the Ingleworth railing.'

'It's Miss Ingleworth's, sir!' answered the sexton in a tone that told of surprise. Then adding, in a more subdued voice, and with increased solemnity: 'We buried her but the day before yesterday. But, sir, I thought *you'd* know all about it.'

'No; I've been absent from England, and as I only returned this morning, hadn't heard of her death. Well, poor lady! I knew she couldn't last long. Drive on, Jarvey!'

At this the flyman flourished his whip, and the carriage moved briskly off—leaving the sexton transfixed to the spot, a picture of perplexity and astonishment.

'It's awkward, this occurrence,' soliloquised Captain Walton, 'not to say ominous, coming at such a crisis. My Nelly had a great regard for her old aunt; and this melancholy affair will, no doubt, be affecting her very much, and make it necessary to postpone the ceremony, for which we've been so long waiting. It would seem as if we were ever to be doomed to disappointment.'

The cloud, which had spread over the speaker's countenance, had nearly passed off as he came within sight of Ingleworth House. But the black hatchment, fixed on the façade, brought it on again; and in solemn silence he was driven up to the door.

Without waiting for the driver to descend from his seat, he sprang out of the fly, and rang the hall bell.

It was answered by a footman with a face as long as could possibly be pulled.

'Is Miss Ingleworth at home, James?'

'Yes, Captain; she is.'

'Announce me!'

The man went off, and soon returning, said:

'Will you please walk in, sir? Miss Ingleworth is down in the drawing-room; she expected you would get here to-day. Sad news it is, sir—for you especially.'

Why for him *especially* Captain Walton did not stay to reflect. His beloved and betrothed was waiting within; and, hurrying past the servant, he pushed open the drawing-room door, and stepped inside. There his steps were arrested by a sight that for a time suspended his heart's pulsation. Instead of his darling Nelly starting up from a chair and rushing forward to receive him, he saw only the maiden aunt reclining upon her invalid couch, as he had often seen her before. Sudden as the lightning's flash, the full truth broke upon him. The question, 'Where is Helen?' came but mechanically from his lips; for, soon as asking, he himself answered it, adding, 'You need not tell me. I know it—I know all—*she is dead!*'

And she was.

* * * * *

As soon as the distracted lover had got over his first wild frenzy of grief, and become calm enough to listen, the particulars of his fiancée's death were communicated to him. There had been no prolonged illness; for Helen Ingleworth had died suddenly, almost in the same hour in which she was seized. He knew this without being told; her letter he received at Marseilles bore date but the day before that of her death, and in it there was no mention of any malady, nor, indeed, much else save their approaching nuptials, with *her* own joyous exultation at their being so near. While writing that letter she had evidently been in the best of spirits—as it proved, alas! too like the fabled swan that sang its sweet song before expiring.

Heart disease had been the cause of her death—as stated by her aunt, and attested by the certificate of the medical man who attended her.

It was but slight solace to the expectant bridegroom, whom death had thus cruelly despoiled, to learn, that he was not also deprived of the property which would have become his on consummation of the marriage ceremony. By a will, soon after put into his hand, he saw that he was made sole possessor of all Helen Ingleworth's estates, some money legacies alone excepted. Though poor—having, indeed, little more than his captain's pay to live on—Henry Walton was not the man to care much for this. Could he have recalled Helen Ingleworth to life, he would have cheerfully surrendered all, and been contented to live with her in the humblest cottage on her estate. Alas! it was not to be. She was dead—dead and buried: he would never see her more!

While glancing over the contents of her will—which by official necessity he was forced to read—one of its clauses struck him as being of a somewhat singular character. Besides a legacy of ten thousand pounds left to her aunt, there was another for an equal amount to be given to the doctor who had attended her! Ten thousand pounds for professional services, as particularised in the wording of the will!

'What were these professional services? What could they be?' very naturally asked Captain Walton of himself. And, directing his inquiries in the proper quarter, he learned, that they consisted in a semi-weekly visit during a period of twelve months, with a few hours' attendance when the final crisis came. 'One hundred pounds per visit! A payment out of all proportion to the service rendered; and

yet no other reason was assigned for the extraordinary bequest. True Dr. Lamson, the lucky legatee, was the family physician—had been for years. But this could not account for Helen Ingleworth having bequeathed him such an enormous sum; and Captain Walton was puzzled for the explanation. The aunt could not give it. Indeed, she too was equally perplexed by the bequest, and not a little nettled to think that a stranger, a doctor, had been remembered in her niece's will to the same amount as herself!

Failing to find a satisfactory clue to this strange clause, Captain Walton not the less determined on executing it. He would faithfully fulfil the trust reposed in him as sole administrator—which he was. It was there in black and white, a solemn testament duly signed by Helen Ingleworth's own hand—how his trembled as he scanned the well-known autograph!—attested by two witnesses; one the lawyer's clerk who had drawn up the will, the other a young man whom Captain Walton remembered being in Dr. Lamson's service—a sort of assistant. This, again, seemed a strange circumstance; though even it did not suggest to the mind of the young officer any suspicion of foul dealing on the part of the physician. The character of the latter forbade such a supposition; and Captain Walton was not given to wicked, or unjust, surmises. Besides, the aunt had informed him that her niece knew she had heart disease. She had often complained of palpitations. But it mattered little now what the disease: she was dead; and, beyond doubt, the doctor's certificate correctly stated the cause of her death.

So concluded Captain Walton, as with a sad heart he set about executing the trusts of the will.

But before he could pay the large sum bequeathed to Dr. Lamson, rumours began to reach him which seemed to give good reason for withholding it—at least for a time. The gossip of the neighbourhood had commenced making itself busy with the physician's name—hitherto spotless and irreproachable. The only thing ever alleged against him was a fondness for the accumulation of money, amounting almost to avarice. He was, moreover, of a taciturn, unsocial, and somewhat cynical habit; and, although admitted to have great skill in his profession, and leading a blameless life, he was anything but popular with the common people.

Of course the news of the grand legacy left him by Miss Ingleworth had spread far and wide—as had also the startling suddenness of her death from a disease at that time but ill understood—and the two, coupled together, at once suggested a suspicion of foul play, directed towards the doctor.

In fine, suspicion took the shape of accusation; the neighbourhood became excited; and an exhumation of Helen Ingleworth's body was demanded. Had Captain Walton wished, he could not have resisted the demand. But he did not wish; for by this time he had himself heard something, and seen something more, that would not only have induced him to consent to the disinterment, but ardently urge it. On his first becoming acquainted with the sinister rumour, he had thought it his duty to call upon Dr. Lamson and state what he had heard.

The young officer, as he commenced making the unpalatable communication, could not help seeing the physician start, turn pale, and so continue to its end. Then he only answered with a sneering, scornful laugh—repeating the cause

of death he had already assigned in his certificate—appending the trite remark, that 'the ignorant country people were ever prone to such absurd imaginings.' As for suspicions directed upon himself, he would not deign to take notice of them.

Finding him in this humour—and otherwise abruptly as peevishly reticent—Captain Walton, apologizing for his well-meant intrusion, took leave—the doctor bowing him out of doors.

Captain Walton was afoot; and on his way homeward was overtaken by a young man whom he recognised as Dr. Lamson's assistant—already spoken of as one of the attesting witnesses to the will. This young fellow, dressed in a stunted, close-fitting suit of threadbare black, with meagre, bone-projecting frame, and skin of bloodless, cadaverous hue, looked as though the doctor was in the habit of copiously phlebotomising him. This, however, was contradicted by the expression of his countenance; which showed no sign of such innocent submission. On the contrary, it betrayed a sort of sinister cunning, like that often observed in the lower class of lawyers' clerks.

As already said, Captain Walton knew this individual, whose name was Nudin. Now remembering his being one of the attesting witnesses, it occurred to the captain to enter into conversation. After a slight salutation, and a word about the weather, he said:

'By-the-way, Mr. Nudin, I see you are one of the witnesses to Miss Ingleworth's will. May I ask at whose instance you signed it?'

'I signed at request of Dr. Lamson, Captain Walton. He sent me special to sign it. I was at home in the dispensing-room; so was he, when Lawyer Luckett called about a witness to the will.

The doctor requested me to go along with Mr. Luckett to Ingleworth House. He was awful anxious about it; no wonder, considerin' the big sum he's to pocket from it.'

'But your signature could not make any difference in that. Any one may attest a will, provided it be a person deemed respectable. There was the butler up at the House, and the head gardener, both men of good character and standing. He might have asked either of them to sign. I wonder he didn't.'

'You may wonder, Captain; but I don't,' rejoined the drug-dispenser, with a significant shrug. 'The doctor had his reasons.'

'Ah! indeed! May I know them, Mr. Nudin?'

'If you'll promise not to tell him that I said anything——'

'Oh! I promise that. It's not likely he and I shall ever exchange confidences of the kind.'

'Well, Captain, to tell the truth, I don't think he wanted anybody to know about the will. Luckett and Dr. Lamson are fast friends; and, between you and me, I suspect the lawyer is to stand in for a trifle of that ten thousand pounds, when the doctor gets it. Of course, Captain, I'm only giving you my suspicions; and wouldn't do that if I didn't feel it to be a sort of duty, where one suspects there's been dealins not quite on the square.'

'It seems somewhat strange, indeed.'

'Ah, Captain! there's something stranger still; and since you've given your word not to peach, I'll tell you that, too.'

Captain Walton listened with all ears.

'Since the makin' of that will,' continued Nudin, 'but more especial since the day of the young lady's death, the doctor hasn't been anything like himself. He's as restless

as a singed stoat; and one night when he fell asleep in the surgery chair, I heard him mutterin' queer things about stickin' pins into people; and, among others, mentioned Miss Ingleworth's name, with the ten thousand pounds legacy. That *does* look strange, don't it?'

'What do you make of it, Mr. Nudin?'

'I declare, Captain, I don't know what to make of it. I only tell you what I've seen and heard. But I must keep on. Good day, sir.'

So saying, the fellow stepped off in silent, slouching gait—leaving Captain Walton wondering at his unsolicited communicativeness.

The demand for exhuming Miss Ingleworth's body had by this time taken the shape of official action; and a coroner's jury was collected, with a number of medical men, the most distinguished in the county, to make the post-mortem examination. The coffin was taken up, and placed upon a marble slab within the railing; for, the day being fine, it was decided to hold the inquest in the open air. Besides the legal authorities, several gentlemen of the district, justices of the peace, were present; all of whom were admitted within the railed inclosure, while the crowd of town and country people clustered thick outside. The churchyard of E—— had never been so filled since that day twelve months before, when the body of another young girl had been accidentally disinterred.

Among the witnesses subpoenaed to be present were Lawyer Luckett and his clerk, with Dr. Lamson himself, and his assistant, Nudin. Captain Walton was of course there—he, in fact, being chief promoter of the inquest.

It would be difficult to depict his feelings when the coffin lid was

lifted off, and he beheld his bride, that was to have been, lying in her shroud. Though her face was white as statuary marble—very different from what it appeared when he last saw it in the bright bloom and roseate hue of health—decay had not yet ‘swept the lines where beauty lingers,’ and Helen Ingleworth looked lovely even in death. The bereaved lover could not bear the sight. Instead of continuing to gaze upon the silent, sightless image of clay, he turned aside, sat down upon a tombstone, and wept.

Meanwhile the inquest, simultaneously with the post-mortem examination, proceeded. The body was taken out of the coffin, and placed upon one of the large blocks of marble intended for its tomb. First, only the head and breast were laid bare. Nothing more was needed at this time; for almost on the instant of the shroud being removed, the searching eye of one of the examining surgeons was attracted to a slight abrasion of the skin directly over the region of the heart. On closer scrutiny it was discovered that a small portion of the cuticle was loose; and this, on being raised, disclosed a puncture underneath, though so slight as scarcely to deserve the name of wound. On the probe being applied, there was the click of metal against metal; and, the forceps being substituted, a steel needle was drawn out, somewhat similar to those used by straw bonnet makers! As it was several inches in length, and its direction straight towards the heart, it had evidently penetrated this organ, piercing it through and through.

A thrill of wildest astonishment electrified the crowd of spectators, all looking aghast. Even the grave medical men for a time lost their composure. Then the senior of them—who by tacit con-

sent was directing the investigation—said, addressing the coroner:

‘I think it is not necessary to proceed further, at present. In this,’ he added holding up the needle, ‘we have clearly the cause of death.’

The other doctors signifying their assent, the coroner commenced his ‘quest,’ Dr. Lamson, who had been sole medical attendant on the deceased lady, being the first witness called.

Questioned as to the cause of her death, he replied by simply stating the nature of the disease—at the same time putting in a copy of his own certificate, entered at the Registrar’s office. Shown the needle, and told where it had been taken from, he was next asked if he knew anything about that.

‘I do,’ was his affirmative reply, made promptly as unexpectedly.

The feeling of astonishment was intense; the bystanders stood with bated breath—every eye keenly bent upon the witness—every ear eagerly listening for what he would next say.

‘Be good enough,’ continued the coroner, ‘to state what you know; and remember, Dr. Lamson, you are on your oath.’

‘I need no reminding of that,’ testily retorted the witness. ‘That needle was placed where you found it *by my own hand*.’

The extraordinary avowal could not increase the surprise, already at its height; but a hum of half-angry ejaculations rose up from among the spectators. Commanding silence, the coroner pursued:

‘For that act, Dr. Lamson, we ask your explanation.’

‘You shall have it. For some months previous to her death, Miss Ingleworth was aware that she suffered from heart disease. Indeed I myself, having become satisfied of the fact, told her of it. Then she spoke of a subject that

had much occupied her mind. No doubt most people present will remember the singular circumstance, which, just a year ago, caused a crowd to assemble within this same cemetery. I speak of the body of a young girl being found in such condition as proved her to have been buried alive. Miss Ingleworth was one of those who came to view it, and was very much affected by the spectacle, as she herself told me. It had taken possession of her mind, so much as to beget a nervous, morbid apprehension that the same thing might happen to herself. I endeavoured to laugh her out of the idea; but she remained serious, and to my great surprise made a request to me, that in the event of my being present at her death, I would take measures to make her secure against the possibility of the dreaded revivification. She even prescribed the mode, and herself gave me that needle you now hold in your hand. I at first flatly refused, and endeavoured to dissuade her from repeating the request. She did so nevertheless, urging it upon me; and to gain my consent made mention of the large legacy which, as you all know, she has left me.'

'Go on, sir!' said the coroner.

'I need hardly expect,' continued the witness, with the air of an injured man, 'I need scarce hope to get credit for having opposed her wish. Much less am I likely to be believed, when I say that it was *not* the legacy that at length induced me to accede to her request. She entreated me, and I yielded—as I now find to my misfortune.'

'Have you any proof of her having made this request—which I must characterise as very extraordinary indeed?'

'I had—in her own handwriting, and with her seal and signature at-

tached—for protection against just such an eventuality as has arisen. She gave me that document, which to my sorrow and chagrin I only yesterday discovered to be missing. I had placed it carelessly in an open pigeon-hole in my dispensing-room—from which some one has abstracted it.'

'Have you any suspicion as to who has taken it?'

'Not any, at present. Many people attend at my house, and patients are often left in the surgery alone.'

At this point of the examination Captain Walton—who had been all the while listening attentively—was observed to direct a searching glance towards Lamson's assistant, Nudin; who, as one of the subpoenaed witnesses, was outside the inclosure waiting for his turn to be called. From his customary cadaverous hue, it would not be correct to say he turned pale; but the captain noticed—what passed unobserved by the others—a singular twitching in the sinews of his crane-like neck, with an expression in his ghoulisn eyes that seemed to say—though only to himself—'I am the guilty one.'

The coroner continued, still addressing Dr. Lamson, and holding out the needle:

'Explain to the jury, how you acted in regard to this. State the exact circumstances: tell everything.'

'There is not much more to tell. As soon as I was assured that life was extinct, I acted according to my promise given to the young lady, and inserted the needle as she had herself instructed me. Of course I sought an opportunity when no one was present by the death-bed. Had I done the thing openly, it is possible no one would have objected; but there might have been talk about a proceeding so unusual, and I should no doubt



Drawn by Adelaide Claxton.]

THE PIERCED HEART.

'She was seen to start and turn pale.'

have been blamed—as I am likely to be now.’

‘More than blamed!’ cried a man from among the outside crowd, his remark followed by a chorus of similar observations.

‘Silence!’ commanded the coroner. ‘I shall order into custody any one who may again interrupt the inquest.’

Then turning to Dr. Lamson, he asked: ‘Will you swear that heart disease was the real cause of Miss Ingleworth’s death?’

‘I will—I do swear it. But why question me further? Complete the post-mortem examination, and that will satisfy you. As you see, upon that needle there is no stain of blood; nor any extravasation around the orifice where it entered. I need not point out to my medical brethren here—that such could not be the case had the needle been inserted into the flesh of a living subject. Let them lay open the breast, and they will find, as stated in my certificate, a case of heart atrophy. On that I shall stake my skill as a physician.’

The medical examiners, accepting the challenge, proceeded to determine the truth of his declaration. Indeed it was evident that on more than one of them his words had produced conviction. Still it was necessary they should be submitted to the test of a thorough post-mortem examination.

But the inconvenience of completing this in the open air suggested the removal of the body into the vestry-room; and thither was it taken—only the coroner, his jury, and other official personages being permitted to accompany it.

When the breast was laid open, and the heart disclosed to view, it was seen that Dr. Lamson’s words were made good. The deceased

lady had died of heart disease—of the special kind called atrophy; or at all events, she had such disease before death. After all, it may not have been it that caused her death; and the uncertainty—along with some suspicion, still lingering in the minds of several of the jurymen—caused some questions to be brought before the medical examiners, in the discussion of which there was a dissidence of opinion.

In the assumed condition of the heart, was it not possible for it to have been pierced without interfering with the flow of blood? Outside it no vein, or artery, had been touched; and therefore the absence of extravasation was thus accounted for. Might it not be the same within the heart itself, and the steel have entered it while still beating? In all likelihood, such questions would never have arisen, but for that legacy of ten thousand pounds—an amount staggering credulity.

Of course Dr. Lamson was not present in the vestry-room—he with the other witnesses having been directed to wait in an ante-chamber, outside.

After a considerable time spent in debating the above points, and night drawing near, the coroner saw fit to postpone his unfinished inquest till the following day; and the witnesses were warned of the hour of re-attendance.

Several of the jury advised placing Dr. Lamson under immediate arrest; but in the doubtful state of the case this was overruled, and he was permitted to depart for his own house. Some hisses saluted him, as he passed out through the churchyard gate; but, bearing it with an indifference, that seemed fortitude itself, the crowd became ashamed of its conduct, and desisted from further demonstration.

Captain Walton returned home, accompanied by a gentleman named Charlecote, whom he had invited to dine with him—an old friend, who was one of the magistrates of the neighbourhood.

As they sat over their wine, smoking an after-dinner cigar, the conversation naturally turned upon the events of the day—soon coming to Dr. Lamson's testimony.

'His story, though certainly very strange, seems probable enough,' remarked the magistrate; 'don't you think so, Walton?'

'I think it not only probable, but *true*. I have more than one reason for so thinking. The absence of extravasated blood is, to my mind, proof positive as to the man's innocence of the higher crime, whatever one may think of his conduct otherwise.'

'May I ask what other reason you have for believing him innocent?'

'One of a very specific and singular character. Among those whom I had subpoenaed as witnesses, you may have observed a lank, lop-sided creature, by name Nudin?'

'What of him?'

After describing his encounter with Nudin on the road, and repeating the conversation that had passed between them, the captain added:

'I believe Lamson tells the truth about a writing having been given to him by my poor Nelly. He has had such a document; and 'tis this Nudin who has stolen it. By Jove!' continued the generous young officer, 'though I have no reason for liking Lamson, and detest his cupidity, if it prove as I suspect, he shall be paid the ten thousand pounds without any demur or delay on my part.'

'Dr. Lamson, sir!' announced

the footman, entering the room; 'he asks if you will see him, sir.'

'Certainly I will. Show him in here.'

'Shall I stay?' asked the magistrate.

'If my visitor does not object. We shall see.'

At this moment the doctor was ushered in, looking grave and pale.

'Perhaps you wish a private interview with me, Dr. Lamson?' said the captain. 'If so, Mr. Charlecote will——'

'No,' interrupted the doctor, bowing to the magistrate; 'I should prefer both of you hearing what I've got to say, and seeing what I have to show. Indeed it is a fortunate circumstance for me that Mr. Charlecote is here. I intended going to your house, sir, this very night, and asking you to favour me with your friendly advice.'

'In what way, Dr. Lamson?' inquired the magistrate.

'This, sir; which I first came to show to Captain Walton, in the hope it may to some extent convince him that I have been telling the truth, and am innocent of the great crime idle tongues have been laying to my charge. On my return home from the inquest, among other letters lying on my table, I found this; which, as you will see, has been sent me through the post.'

So saying, he handed Captain Walton a letter, whose envelope, already open, bore the address, '*Dr. Lamson*,' with only a single post-mark, that of E—— itself. The stamped date showed that the letter had been dropped into the office that same day. It read thus:—

'If Dr. Lamson will consent to part with one thousand pounds out of the ten thousand he is to get by Miss Ingleworth's will, he can have restored to him a docu-

ment signed with her name, and which he may stand in need of to keep his neck out of the hangman's halter. If he agrees to this proposal, and will signify so by burning a blue light in his bedroom window this night at twelve, by to-morrow morning's post he will receive another communication, telling him how to pay over the money, and get possession of the paper so precious to him.'

There was no name signed, nor any address; only the bald conditions as above.

'Have you any idea, or suspicion, of who wrote it?' asked Captain Walton, addressing himself to the doctor.

'Not the slightest. The handwriting is entirely unknown to me.'

'To me too,' said Mr. Charlecote, after examining it. 'It seems a disguised hand—in all likelihood is.'

'Perhaps I can put you on a scent, Doctor,' interposed Captain Walton, after a whispered communication with the magistrate. 'If I mistake not, you have in your service a young man named Nudin.'

'I have—as honest a fellow as ever breathed—at least so I believe him.'

'It may be that you overrate his honesty. I have reason to think him the very opposite; and that he is not only dishonest, but as great a traitor as ever served a trusting master.'

'You astonish me, Captain Walton! I have always found him faithful.'

'That is because you have not found him out. You may have an opportunity now. Does he sleep in your house?'

'No—he is only there during the day. At night he goes home to his mother; who lives in a cottage on the outskirts of the town.'

At this Captain Walton and the magistrate exchanged significant glances. Nudin's sleeping outside the doctor's house made more probable the suspicion they had already conceived.

Mr. Charlecote spoke first.

'You have said, Dr. Lamson, you were coming to me for friendly counsel. Fortunately, from what my friend Captain Walton has told me, I am able to bestow it. I advise you, then, to lose no time in having Mr. Nudin handed over to the custody of the police. As a magistrate, I am able to give you the necessary authority; and, if you wish, will make out a warrant this very minute.'

'Doctor, you will do well to take Mr. Charlecote's advice,' counselled Captain Walton. 'It is altogether in your own interest, and for your good.'

'But, gentlemen, would it not be wrong, my having him arrested—an outrage on an innocent young man?'

'If he prove innocent,' put in Mr. Charlecote, 'it will do him no harm. If the contrary, you will have no reason to regret the steps taken.'

'Dr. Lamson,' said the captain, 'I've good reasons to believe Nudin guilty of purloining the paper you have spoken of. I could give them to you, and would, but for a promise made that I cannot lightly break. But there is no need, as it will not embarrass our action in this matter. All I can say is, that your honest assistant is a traitor to you. I have had proof of it; and if you act on Mr. Charlecote's advice, and have him at once taken into custody, you will, in all probability, find upon his person the document for which this anonymous scribbler wants you to pay one thousand pounds.'

Dr. Lamson was thunderstruck; but at length, yielding to the con-

viction that his assistant must be as represented, he requested the magistrate to give him the warrant already offered.

It was immediately made out; and, with a note addressed by Mr. Charleote to the Police superintendent of the district, placed in Dr. Lamson's hands; who, thanking the gentlemen for their unexpectedly friendly reception of him, took his leave.

It was 11 P.M. before he reached the Police station; but in less than an hour after Nudin was in the safe keeping of a couple of blue-coated constables. He was not taken at his mother's house, but in a shaded alley off a side street, where he was found skulking, with eyes fixed on Dr. Lamson's bedroom window—watching for the *blue light*. No doubt, had that appeared to his satisfaction, he had concocted some plan by which he could safely receive the blackmail money. For, just as Captain Walton had predicted, on his person, carefully put away in one of the pockets of his threadbare paletot, was found the missing evidence of his master's innocence.

The document contained a declaration by Miss Ingleworth, in which she minutely particularised everything that related to her covenant with Dr. Lamson—describing her own apprehensions upon the subject of revivification, and her instructions to take measures against it—even to providing him with the needle with which her heart was to be pierced! It concluded with a testimony of his reluctance to undertake the strange trust—only yielding to her most earnest solicitation—in short, completely exonerating the physician, as far as such declaration could.

There could be no doubt about the genuineness of the document. It was in Helen Ingleworth's own handwriting—known to hundreds

—with her autograph underneath, beside the family seal.

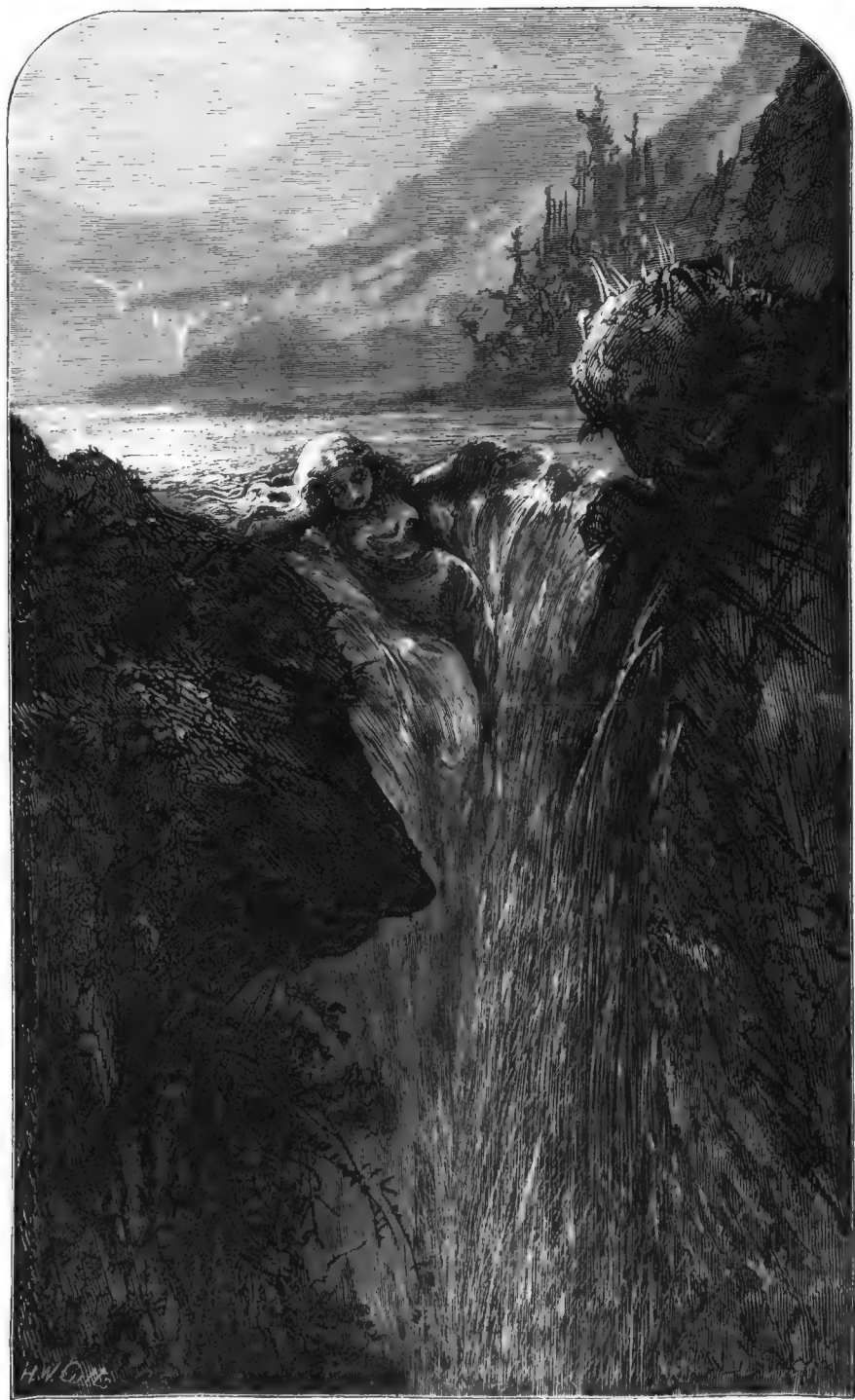
Next morning, on the inquest being resumed, this paper was laid before the jury—with the testimony of the police as to how, when, and where obtained. The medical examiners had already put in their report; which completely cleared Dr. Lamson from the charge of taking the young lady's life—atrophy of the heart having been at length unanimously decided by them as the cause of her death. The new evidence of the doctor's innocence satisfied the coroner's jury; and the case, that came so near being carried to the criminal court, was thus abruptly brought to a close.

But although Dr. Lamson's character was vindicated, and no one any longer coupled his name with the crime of murder, still a certain odium attached to it, on account of his taking the ten thousand pounds legacy—which in due course of the will's administration was paid over to him.

In the end, finding residence in E—no longer either pleasant or profitable, he disappeared from the place—having gone, as was supposed, under a changed name, to Australia.

As for Nudin, he went in the same direction—though not willingly. His attempt to extort money, in such a cowardly as well as treacherous manner, so impressed a criminal judge and jury as for ten years to deprive the traitor of his personal liberty, and procure for him a free passage to the penal settlement of Tasmania.

The quiet seaside town of E—has since become a populous and popular watering-place; but, among its oldest inhabitants, there are many who remember the incidents above detailed, and can vouch for the truth of this story of *THE PIERCED HEART*.



Drawn by E. Wagner.]

THE NYMPH OF THE WATERFALL.

THE NYMPH OF THE WATERFALL.

THERE runs a river in Northern land,
 Where rocks frown darkly on either hand,
 And pine-trees tall and grim
 Mirror themselves in the waters swift,
 And drop on the stream full many a gift
 Of green and brown, that it sweeps to the rift
 To plunge in a pool so dim.

A silent tarn beneath the fall,
 Which, though the waters above may brawl,
 Lies ever dark and calm ;
 A grave that swallows the turbulent life
 Of the rushing river, and ends its strife,
 And its tale of a passage with thwarting rife,
 And its last grand jubilant psalm.

As it flings itself through the Lovers' Leap,
 In the peaceful tarn to be still, and sleep
 Where the lovers sleep below ;
 The lovers who dared that grisly way
 Whereby the path of their safety lay ;—
 A spirit there watches amid the spray
 That springs to the torrent's flow.

The moon shines fair upon Norway's heights,
 And the stream that ripples with silver lights
 To cliff and to crag doth call ;
 Over the river the pine-trees moan,
 And the waves dash on by brier and stone,
 To where by the leap she watches alone,
 The Nymph of the Waterfall.

There where the torrent cuts through the land
 She floats in the moonlight, with head on hand,
 She floats when the nights are drear ;
 And they who wander the river by
 May see her form in the moonlight lie,
 Or hear through darkness her warning cry
 As she floats on her heaving bier.

The Nymph of the Waterfall.

Fair was the daughter of Norway's lord,
That loved a knight from the Southern sward,
 And fled with her love by night :
Alas, for the treading of slippery ways !
Alas, for the listing of Southern lays !
For the foot that slipped in the silver haze,
 And the lovers lost to sight !

Oh, Elsa fair ! oh, Elsa sweet !
Such bridal bed for thee was meet,
 Pure as thy maiden soul ;
Bright at the first as thy royal state,
Dark at the last as thy sorrowful fate,
Fleeting and wild as the love and hate
 That died in the black tarn's goal.

The pine-trees mourn, and the waters rave
Where the flower of Norway found her grave,
 With weeds for a funeral pall ;
But still her spirit watches above
The place where she sleeps with her steel-clad love,
To guard true lovers by night that rove—
 The Nymph of the Waterfall.

B. MONTGOMERIE RANKING.



A₂O,NO₅.

A Doctor's Story.

IT is more than five-and-twenty years since I first set up in practice in this part of the country, coming here a stranger to it. Now I know every inch of the road for miles round, rough and wild as it is; then I often lost my way, and it was with some difficulty in so sparsely-populated a country that I learned the landmarks which guide you over the moors when bad weather obliterates the track.

You remember, when we rode over the summit of the moor yesterday, how you admired the distant view of the sea, and how you called my attention also to the picturesque appearance of a deserted and dismantled cottage on the right of us. The view of the sea is undoubtedly a fine one, and strikes me now every time I see it, even after many years' acquaintanceship; but I cannot admire that cottage, though rich green moss and yellow lichen have gathered upon its thatched roof, and though the purple heather grows close up to its walls. I responded to your admiration of the view of the sea, but I said nothing about that cottage, nor you may remember now, did I make any response to your fancies regarding it. A worn and wholly-obliterated sign hangs before it; the place had evidently been an inn, you said; and as we rode down the hill, you indulged in some fanciful speculations as to old travellers who had sought shelter therein; and how the wind must have beaten round it at nights, bringing strange messages from the storm-tossed sea, and scaring them with its violence even within the stoutly-built walls. The place

looked as if it had a story, you said, and on my assenting, you pressed me to tell it. I now fulfil my promise; and no one can tell you the story of that roadside inn with more authority than I can, for I passed the most terrible and memorable night of my life there, and had something more to scare me than sounds of wind or sea.

I came here, immediately after passing the College, nearly thirty years ago, a stranger, as I have said, and was at first assistant to a Dr. Greenfield, long since dead, who afterwards took me into partnership. The practice in those days was not what it is now—for this town has grown wonderfully of late years, as also have some of the surrounding hamlets—though we had a great deal of outside practice beyond the moor, and even in some places still more distant. A country doctor's life is not a very enviable one. He does not get paid too liberally, his fees are small, and the gratitude he earns with them still smaller, while the amount of responsibility thrown upon his shoulders is enormous. Bear with a word or two in defence of my profession. You go to a London doctor, who examines you, prescribes, and pockets his guinea, and probably you never see him again. You return to my care—your regular medical man in the country, and if you get well, what a wonderful man the London doctor is; while if you die, I am blamed for it. Take another case. It is comparatively easy to perform an operation in a London hospital, where, if you fail, there are half-a-dozen men competent to take up the knife and finish your

work: it is another thing to have to perform a hurried operation with the nearest medical man miles away, and no one to help you but an unqualified assistant, or perhaps a dispenser, whose knowledge of surgery is, to say the most of it, painfully rudimentary.

Liberavi animam! You will pardon it, and I will go on with my story.

Some few weeks after I had come here, I had occasion to go and visit one or two patients in the little cluster of cottages about two miles beyond the top of the moor, and consequently between ten and eleven miles from the town. It was a fine winter day, and the snow lay crisp and bright in the sunshine. There was no need for haste, and we were by no means busy, so I determined to walk. I was young and active then, and I seldom lost the opportunity of walking, for by so doing I gained a better knowledge of the country, as well as an increment of health from the exercise.

The journey to the town was a long one for poor people, so we kept a small stock of medical necessities at the place of which I have spoken, under the guardianship of one of the cottagers, and I took several small articles I remembered we required there, among them a little phial of a strong solution of nitrate of silver, to be diluted hereafter and used for certain diseases of the eye.

Bear in mind that little phial of nitrate of silver, for, under Providence, it brought a murderer to the gallows.

I set off briskly for my twelve-mile walk about noon. On my road over the moor I passed that cottage inn; the sign was legible then, and it told how Gabriel Sturm provided good entertainment for man and beast—the

house looking far more suited to travellers of the latter species than the former. It looked, indeed, nearly as woe-begone then as it does now, and as if few wayfarers cared to accept Mr. Gabriel Sturm's offer. This was the case, I learned afterwards; for the house had a bad name, though I had been too short a time in the neighbourhood to hear of it. How far that reputation was deserved you shall presently judge. In the meantime, picture me striding bravely up the hill, now and then having to make a detour upon the moor to avoid an unusually formidable snowdrift. I reached Hobtrush—for so the cluster of cottages which was my destination was named, after a local spirit supposed to haunt woods—and on arriving there I found more work to do than I had expected. There was, moreover, a young woman, who, with a consideration for her medical man not often shown by her sex in such cases, took the opportunity of presenting her husband with another baby, and so saved me a special journey. All this made me very late, and had there been any accommodation in Hobtrush I might have been tempted to stay. As it was, I made up my mind for the walk, fervently trusting it would be moonlight. But before I went, I looked carefully over our small surgery, which was in an attic room in the cottage, and regarded with superstitious reverence by the inhabitants. These may seem trivial details, but, as you will see, they are essential to the story. At the surgery, among others, I did three things: 1. I found more of the nitrate of silver solution than I expected, so I merely filled up the small bottle and replaced the little phial in its case. 2. I had entertained some suspicion of the goodness of a certain acid supplied

us, and finding an old bottle of it on an obscure shelf, I put it in my pocket to take home and test its strength. 3. I found the ring of the large brass syringe we kept there was broken; the syringe worked perfectly well, but the ring should be mended, and I pocketed it also for that purpose. I need mention nothing else—the silver solution, the acid, and the syringe are all the details with which I need trouble you.

I started off at a brisk pace, and even as I did so I could feel the wind rising; and I had not gone above a hundred yards or so when I felt a flake of snow fall on my face. That ought to have warned me; but I was somewhat stubborn and self-willed, and I determined at all hazards to persevere. Night fell, but neither moon nor friendly stars shone out, and presently I found myself in the midst of a heavy snow-storm. For some time I managed to keep to the track—at least, so I imagined; but at length I became conscious that I had lost it, though I flattered myself that I was blundering on in the right direction. For a little time the snow-storm seemed to slacken; at all events, I was able to make some progress. After a short time I felt myself getting drowsy; but I knew it would be death to stop; and then again the flakes came down heavier than ever, and I could hardly make headway at all against the driving wind and drifting snow. I was plodding feebly on, when suddenly, above the noise of the storm, I heard a sound that, cold as I was, seemed to chill me through and through. It was a wild, loud scream—a man's, I concluded; for it was strangely strong and hoarse, and it continued until suddenly it was broken off sharply, and I heard no more. Something had stopped it, or, I

argued, a turn of the wind might have suddenly swept the sound away from me.

It was sufficiently appalling, and on first hearing it I started violently and dropped my stick, which, in the thick snow, I was unable to find. What terrible scene was being enacted on that wild moor on such a night? What criminal was trusting to the white snow to hide his crime? I nerved myself for an effort, and struggled on wildly for what seemed a long time; and at last I came against a door half covered with the drifted snow, and almost at the same moment my foot struck against something in the snow, and stooping down, I picked up, to my intense astonishment, the stick I had dropped an hour ago. Close to the door was a narrow window, through which I could see a faint light, and in an instant I recognised three terrible facts connected with my situation.

In the first place, I had walked for hours, and had only covered the two miles which separated Gabriel Sturm's from Hobtrush. I knew it was the house, for I could feel the sign above the low door. In the second place, I had passed close to it an hour or more ago, as my stick proved, and therefore must be wandering in a circle. In the third place—and this fact was the most terrible—the awful scream I had heard *must*, humanly speaking, have come from some one inside the lonely inn.

But whatever might have happened, I must have shelter, for I could not have struggled a yard farther; so I knocked loudly at the door, and after some delay it was opened.

The man who let me in—I can say now it was Gabriel Sturm—was most anxious, apparently, I should not see his face. He had

a large comforter round the lower part of it; and a hat slouched over the forehead; while the horn-lantern he carried gave out a dim, uncertain light.

'What d'you want?' he said, in a hoarse voice.

I would have given a great deal to have been able to turn away; but better the possible dangers inside the house than the merciless storm without, so I answered:

'A night's lodging. I can get no farther in this snow.'

The man hesitated a good deal; certainly an innkeeper, this, who did not care much for custom; and at last he said gruffly:

'Come in.'

With a shiver that was not owing to the cold, I crossed the threshold, and found myself in a low room, very roughly and scantily furnished, with a doorway in a corner leading out of it to the upper storey. I could see also by the dim light a few rough shelves, with some bottles and pewter pots upon them. Still keeping his face as much as possible in shadow, but still, I could see, intently watching me, he took down a bottle and a wineglass, and then saying brusquely, 'This road; I sleep here,' led the way upstairs. As he strode up, he said, as if an afterthought, 'And there's no one else in the house'—pleasant news from such a man. I followed him, and was shown into a small room containing a bed, a chair, and a table, and a small press near the door. Sturm put the lantern on the table, filled out a wineglass of the liquor, and saying 'Whisky,' handed it to me. Strange to say, he retained the bottle, which at once aroused my suspicions; so I drank, and then only nodded. He gruffly said 'Good-night,' and strode out of the room. The moment his back was turned I discharged the whisky, which I had

retained in my mouth, into the basin; at all events, I thought, I would not be drugged.

Two things were very noticeable: his anxiety not to be seen himself, and his evident desire to watch me that I should see nothing more of the house than he chose to show me—should not take a step into any room or passage other than those through which he led me. He succeeded in both, for I never, even when he offered me the whisky, had a fair look at his face; and, at the same time, I felt that he watched me narrowly.

I felt very sleepy from cold and exposure; but I had made up my mind that I must not go to sleep, or my life would be in danger. I felt that as I stepped over the threshold, and it increased upon me every moment; a conclusion arrived at on insufficient premises, you will say, but, nevertheless, one that I never staid to argue with myself; a conclusion justified, too, after these discoveries.

After putting out the whisky, which, as I anticipated, smelt strongly of opium, I tried to fasten the door, but found no lock or means of doing so—merely a latch. This was not reassuring; and I made another discovery shortly which alarmed me still more. The table, I found, formed part of the bed. The chair, as it seemed at first, was a seat imitating one let into the wall, into which also the press was fastened. There was nothing to drag against the door, and nothing to turn into an offensive weapon; for there was neither fender nor fire-irons, and the wash-bowl was tin and very small. I was caught in a death-trap, and scarcely dared to breathe a prayer that I might get out of it safely, so impossible did it seem. For some time I was stunned; and if Sturm had come up then I should have

been an easy victim. I seemed in imagination to die, and the shock nearly deprived me of my senses.

But I kept awake, and gradually got accustomed to the situation, awful as it was. I seemed resigned to the struggle which I felt must come sooner or later, and my mind began to wander vaguely round the subject. I can recall my thoughts now; but I hardly know in what order they succeeded each other then.

Sturm would be sure to be armed; moreover, he had evidently the strength of a giant, and I was by no means strong, and had nothing whatever with which to defend myself, except (the absurdity struck me even then) a syringe! A syringe and a bottle of diluted acid. You smile at the idea now, as, even in the horror of the moment, I could smile at it then; and yet, as the event proved, the two together made a weapon not to be despised. The syringe, as I have said before, worked perfectly well, and only wanted the ring-handle fastening. It was a very powerful instrument, and would carry a strong, continuous douche of any fluid within it a considerable distance, spreading as it went farther, just as shot spreads out of a gun. As for the acid, if once a man received any of that, or even the spray, in his eyes, he would certainly be blinded for some hours, if not for life—the latter a contingency which, in my desperate situation then, I did not for a moment consider.

I do not know how the idea, which you will now have seized, flashed across my mind; but I saw that if only I could get an opportunity of syringing Mr. Sturm's eyes in a wholly non-professional way, I had a very good chance of escaping. The only difficulty was how to get the chance of applying my novel charge when the attack

came; and, though it seems simple enough now, it cost me many minutes of agonising thought before I could determine it on that night.

The storm had abated, and the moon was shining out, flooding the room—for the window had no blind—with a stream of silver. It behoved me, in the first place, then, to make up some semblance of myself, and place it in the bed, and, in the second, to conceal myself where, unseen, I could get near my assailant. I could not get behind the door, for it opened right on to the press; and, moreover, before my attack, I was bound to be sure of my assailant's intention; for my host might come to visit me in a friendly way only, and I must be cautious. You laugh, as I can now, at such casuistry; but it is a fact that I *did* go through that process of reasoning then, and acted upon it.

There was a little space between the press and the bed. In that I crouched down, having arranged the bolster and my coat under the clothes to resemble, as far as I could manage it, a sleeping man. Then I took out my syringe, and tried it very gently in the bottle of acid, and, with a beating heart, and pulses which seemed to sound all over the room, waited the event.

My preparations had taken some time, and I was not kept long in suspense. Very shortly I heard a stealthy footfall on the stairs, which, step by step, approached my door, and then stopped. I forced myself (I don't know how, now) to breathe heavily and regularly, as if in sleep, and, after a few moments' hesitation, I felt, rather than heard, the door open. A slight jar against the press told me it was wide open, and that the spring was to come.

I had no idea, you see, of the

nature of the attack. Would Sturm fire on me? Would he spring upon the bed and smother me? Would he stab me, or beat out my brains? The catalogue, you will admit, has a certain interest for you now; judge how it affected me then. I heard, or fancied I heard, a heavier and more decided step than any which had been taken before, and I knew that the moment had come.

I have seen performed most of the greatest operations of the day, here and on the Continent, and I have more than once witnessed a certain tremor and hesitation on the part of the surgeon just before the operation began. The moment the knife touched the flesh, his nerves were steel, and the work was done as if by machinery.

I do not talk boastfully when I say that, whereas when I listened to the footsteps and felt the door open, it was only by a superhuman effort I preserved myself from a dead faint, yet, when I knew a second or two would end the affair one way or the other, my hand was firm as a rock, and I held the syringe charged as coolly as I now hold this cigar, or as I should hold the knife at an operation.

Sturm was breathing heavily; but for a moment I heard him catch his breath in, and then, with a low growl, like a wild beast rushing at its food, he sprang forward and, with a short crowbar, dealt a fearful blow at the place where, but for God's mercy, my head would have been. Again and again he repeated his blows, not seeing, in the blind fury of murder, that they were falling harmless; and then, seemingly exhausted, he drew back, and, with wide-open, bloodshot eyes, gazed upon his handiwork.

Then was my chance. The murderer crouched over the bed, with the moonlight full on his

face, hardly a foot from me. In another minute he would have discovered his mistake and seen me; but steadily I raised the syringe, and exactly at the time when his gaze turned to me, I gave him a full ounce of the acid straight in his eyes.

I have no words to describe the fearful yell of 'astonishment, of fright, and of pain which he emitted. He would have faced either a blow, a stab, or a shot boldly enough, I dare say, though in any case he must have been terribly startled; but I had used a weapon unknown in his armoury, and the effect was like that of a thunder-bolt.

He gave a spasmodic leap into the air, the crowbar fell from his hands, and then he fell prone. Then, with a repetition of his awful yell, accompanied by a perfect hurricane of oaths and imprecations, he staggered to his feet with the evident intention of finding his assailant.

But it was in vain. The strong irritant had done its work, and he could not open his blighted eyes for a second. He was, indeed, blind; and after a frantic rush against the press, in which he cut his forehead severely, he felt the door, and staggering out, fell headlong downstairs. I heard the crash, and then all was still.

Simultaneously with his fall I must have fainted; and had Sturm had any accomplices, I must have fallen an easy victim to them. At last I roused myself, and still hearing no sound, ventured downstairs, the way through the front room being the only means of egress. I imagined my antagonist had gone out, but, at any rate, I knew he must be blinded still; but before I got downstairs I could see him lying flat on his face, his head buried in his arms. A bottle was thrown down beside

him, and he was breathing stertorously: he had evidently taken refuge from his agony in the stupor of drunkenness.

I was passing lightly out, when it suddenly struck me that, except when I saw it in the moonlight, I had never obtained a good view of my antagonist's face. He had shaded it, as I said, coming in—it was terribly distorted when I saw it for that single moment—and I could not be certain of recognising it; while it was hidden on his arms now. I had blinded him, you will say, but I could not judge of the effect of the acid, nor how long it would last. At all events I determined to mark my friend, who was quite insensible, so that for ten days or so I should be able to identify him. I took my little bottle of strong solution of nitrate of silver, and just under his handkerchief, at the back of his neck, I traced, with a camel's-hair pencil accompanying the solution, the figure of a cross. You know the action of the sun upon salts of silver; if his eyes recovered quickly, I should still have something to identify my man by; for I did not know then whether it was Sturm or some lodger who had made the attempt on my life. I was, however, to meet my assailant again sooner than I expected.

* * * * *

Immediately on reaching home, before I could see any one, I was called off to another case, which kept me till the morning of the next day. Arriving home then, I was told that Dr. Greenfield had gone to an inquest of a man who had met with his death at Gabriel Sturm's inn. At Gabriel Sturm's! As you may imagine, I hurried off, and was just in time to hear my late adversary tell the following ingenious story, which revealed to me, and to me alone, the fearful extent of his crimes.

The body of a man had been found in the inn with his skull broken in by a crowbar. That Gabriel Sturm admitted to have done, but said it was in self-defence, and that his assailant had thrown vitriol, or some such substance, into his eyes. In proof of which there he was, nearly blind, with his eyes in a terrible state of inflammation.

That plausible story, which he had evidently concocted in desperation, trusting to the chapter of accidents not to bring his real antagonist forward, would have probably brought about his discharge; but I stepped forward, and requested to be examined, saying I could throw some light on the subject. There was a general murmur of astonishment, and even the doctor turned to me (remember I had seen no one) and asked what I could know about the affair.

However, it was impossible to overlook the offer of such evidence, and I was sworn. I then told, carefully and circumstantially, the story you have just heard, when, to my astonishment and disgust, I could see that it was looked upon with a good deal of suspicion. You see, I was quite a stranger in the place; and, if you look at the balance of probabilities, Sturm's story was in some ways better than mine. His solicitor ridiculed my whole narrative, but said he could believe the strange use of the syringe, &c., if I had any evidence that I was ever in the place. I had come back, too, and gone off again, and he asked was I not wandering on the moor all the time. In fact, I saw he was making an impression; and it seemed also that the jury were unwilling to condemn a neighbour on such extraordinary evidence given by a stranger. If I could prove I was in the cottage—and Sturm, who could hardly see,

swore I had not been there—the story would have a very different complexion.

Suddenly the mark I had made upon the murderer flashed across me, and I brought it forward as proof. With considerable difficulty the coroner allowed Sturm's neck to be bared; but amid loud murmurs, and to my horror, no mark was to be found. Had it been removed? I felt certain it had not. It had only been covered up, and exposure to the sunlight would bring it out. I demanded that Sturm's neck should be turned to the winter sun, then shining through the windows, explaining as well as I could how it was the mark had not appeared.

After much objection, this was done, and then, amid a scene of indescribable excitement, the sun gradually acted upon the salt of silver, and by degrees the place blackened, till slowly and surely

the mark came out; and there was the accusing cross, a silent witness to the truth of my story, and a sure condemnation of him who would fain have been a double murderer.

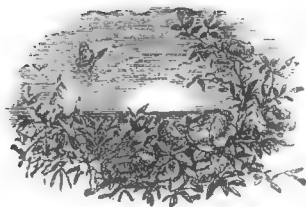
'It is a conjuror's trick,' cried the solicitor angrily, while Sturm stood stunned and puzzled, and the people leant eagerly forward to catch a glimpse of the mysterious mark.

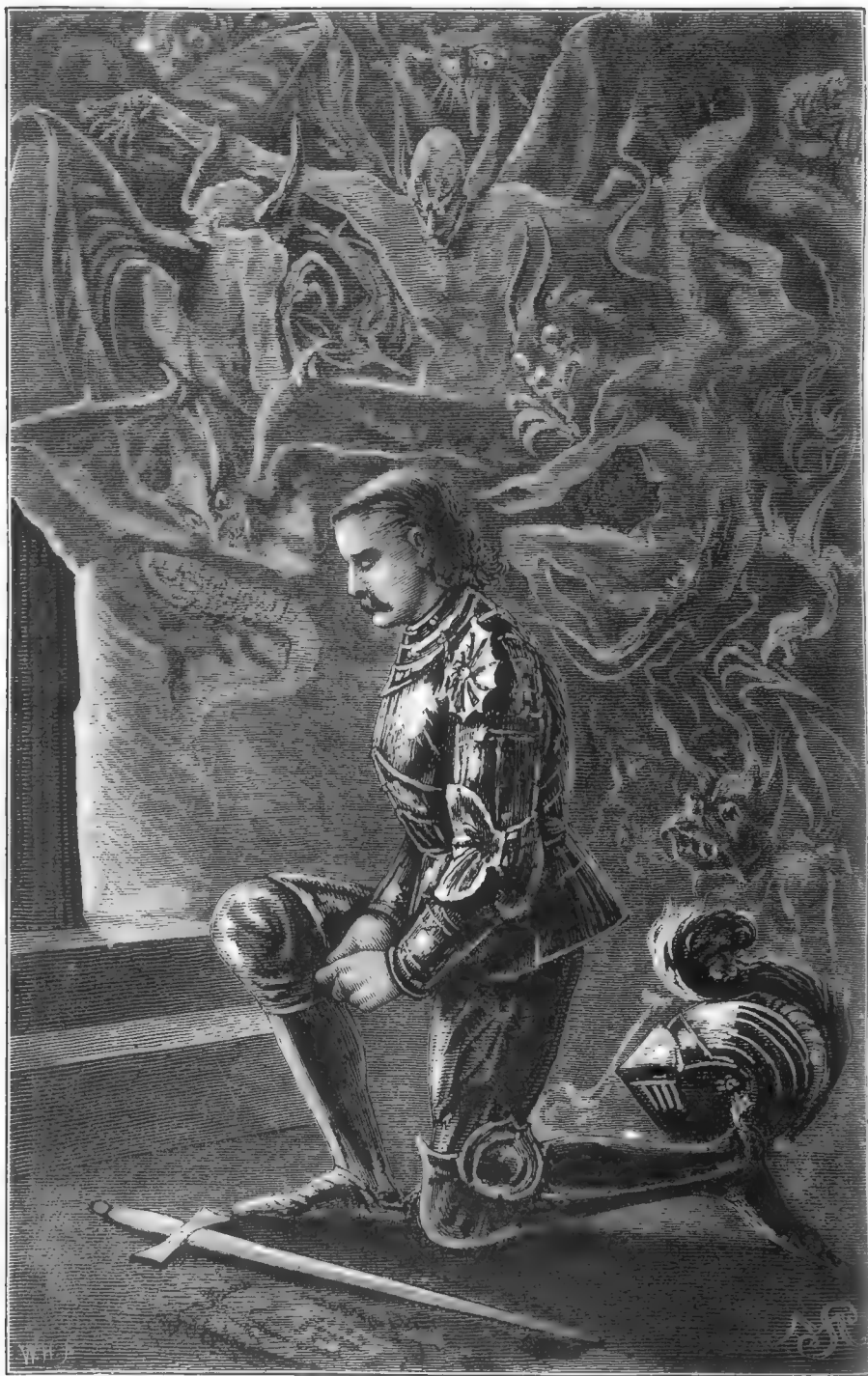
'No,' said the coroner, 'it is no trick. That cross is the handwriting of Providence.'

* * * * *

Open that box on your right, and you will see my relics—the syringe, the bottle of acid, and that little phial labelled $\text{A}_6\text{O}, \text{NO}_5$ —the chemical expression for nitrate of silver; while I may finish my story by telling you that before the cross faded from Mr. Gabriel Sturm's neck he was punctually hanged.

H. SAVILE CLARKE.





Drawn by Matt. Stretch.]

THE CURSÈD CHAPELLE.

'He sank on his knees and in silence adored.'

THE CURSED CHAPELLE.

ROUND the bleak coasts of Britain, as daylight declined,
 The tempest was rising, full sad sighed the wind,
 Like the wail of a spirit, lamenting for ever
 The rest he shall find again never, ah never !

The waves of the ocean come rolling amain,
 With a hoarse shout of triumph o'er those they have slain ;
 'Neath the cliff, wild exulting, they leap and they roar,
 But sobbing they die on the low-lying shore.

The low shore of Lyonesse stretched to the main,
 Little life might you see on that desolate plain ;
 Each herb was destroyed, for the slow-drifting sand
 Had stealthily buried its victim, the land.

Alone on the shore stands the old ruined shrine,
 There rises no incense, no tapers now shine ;
 The porch yawning darkly stands open to all,
 The roof is scarce borne by the tottering wall.

The founder, the builder, unknown were to fame,
 But the chapel had long borne a terrible name ;
 For fiends held the ruins ; their far-moaning glee
 Rang out at deep midnight o'er land and o'er sea.

Yet now, through the mists of the evening, draws near
 A knight to the portal, scarce recking of fear ;
 Sir Raoul of Cornwall, who boldly hath sworn
 For the love of his lady to watch there till morn.

She was proud ; and she, scornfully laughing, had said,
 ' Since you love me so dearly, hear this ! I will wed
 With that man alone who, all safely and well,
 Shall watch through the night in the Cursed Chapelle !'

Oh ! light laughed the lady, and down knelt the knight,
 He kissed her small hand, and his eyes they shone bright ;
 ' So dearly I love thee, thou scornful Adèle,
 I go for thy sake to the lonely chapelle !'

As he stepped to the portal, full loud roared the gale,
 The sea low-lamenting with sorrowful wail ;
 As he passed through the arch, from the desolate north,
 In its maniac pomp, the wild tempest broke forth.

He has passed through the nave ; all around him there seem
 Faint laughters, and forms indistinct as a dream ;
 But he recks not the visions his sight that flit past,
 Nor the low-muttered sounds that come borne on the blast.

He reaches the chancel ; the lightning's blue glare
Illumines the place, but no altar is there ;
Yet he sees where the shaft of the old cross of stone
Still stands, though the cross is all broken and gone.

Oh, loud roar the breakers, and wild howls the wind !
With the thunder half deaf, with the lightning half blind,
Still boldly he stands, as defying the storm ;
Ha ! See, up the nave glides a shadowy form.

The darkness is moving, foul visions arise,
They swarm to the chancel with wild, hollow cries !
Now glares the blue storm-light, a triumphing yell
Bursts forth, and the fiends fill the ruined chapelle.

He placed on the pavement his cross-hilted sword,
He sank on his knees, and in silence adored ;
The fiends they fled back, but if wandered his eyes
Straight swarmed they around him in loathliest guise.

So all through the night, in the Cursèd Chapelle,
That knight watched for love of his scornful Adèle ;
And now the storm sinks, as the cold grey of dawn
Shows faint in the east, and day's curtains are drawn.

With wild baffled yell they fast faded in air,
To the dark caves of hell sped the fiends in despair ;
They knew from that hour that unbound was the spell,
That gone was their power o'er the ruined chapelle.

The cold breath of morning is felt through the place,
The knight he still kneels with no change on his face ;
The first ray of sunlight streaks o'er the grey stone,
Where scatheless and fearless the knight kneels alone.

The sun lights his brow as he rises at last,
Exulting he smiles, for the trial is past ;
Thus murmuring, paced he athwart the green sward,
'Thou art conquered, fair lady, and I am thy lord !'

When he knelt at her feet with his tale of that night,
She sank on his breast, all a-tremble and white.
And she said, as he kissed off the tears that fell fast,
'Thou hast conquered me, Raoul, I own it at last !'

'I loved thee before, but my pride bade me hold ;
When wildest my heart beat, my smile was most cold ;
But now I am thine, so doth true love prevail ;
Canst pardon thy tyrant, thy wilful Adèle ?'

To his breast now he clasps her, all sorrows are past ;
The night has flown over, the day comes at last,
The chant sounds again from the lonely chapelle,
And there wed Sir Raoul with lovely Adèle.

B. MONTGOMERIE RANKING.

THE BRIDAL OF LA GUILLOTIÈRE.

RAOUL DE ST. VICTOR de la Guillotière in the days of Louis XII. built himself a castle on a rocky height in one of the southern provinces of France. He called to his counsels an eminent Italian, named Lodovico Stresa, famous in engineering and in the skilful application of his art to his undertakings. Raoul was a morose and saturnine man, feared, but not loved; a brave knight, a trusty soldier, but cursed with a temper never known to gain a friend or forgive an enemy. Rumours, after a while, began to circulate amongst the peasants of the estate that, in the centre of the pile of towers, frowning keep, and buttressed and embattled walls, a chamber was being constructed whence those who should be introduced, the door being once closed, would never be able to find the outlet, but would, so these worthies averred, perish miserably in a forgotten solitude.

Be this as it may, nothing was ever discovered of the interior arrangements of the gloomy castle; no object of the Count's enmity was ever known to disappear, and the story descended as a fireside legacy, handed from one gossip to another to frighten the children withal, by a vague and mysterious threat of giving them to the Count to be put away so securely in his hiding-place, that their own mother should never be able to find them again.

Raoul de St. Victor died, however, and was gathered to his fathers. The secret of the castle, if there was one, perished with him, or was hidden in his grave. The castle and its demesne lapsed to a distant kinsman, in whose line it continued, till, not long before the outbreak of the first French

revolution, the lord of La Guillotière, a handsome, blithe, and charming youth, lived alone with his mother, a hospitable pair, in the old grey walls, and chiefly delighted to assemble around them the young and gay of all the country-side, to hold high revel, and to frolic through the formal gardens and the dark pine woods, throughout unwearied summer days.

On one such day as this, amongst the guests, Albert de St. Victor might have been observed bending with greatest interest over the dark head of Athénais de Brélan-court, the single beautiful and beloved daughter of her mother, whose château adjoined La Guillotière at no great distance. The youthful chatelaine's countenance, at once arch and dreamy, spoke of an enthusiastic and romantic soul; her lovely face, lit up with the ardent warmth and passion of the South, glanced like a ray of sunshine through the gloomy halls. Her lithe limbs, buoyant steps, and graceful movements enchanted the young man, and before many weeks had expired a brilliant company met again to celebrate the marriage of the youthful pair. The ceremony ended at the little church of the hamlet, the bride, a shade paler than her wont, the bridegroom, flushed with exultant gaiety, re-entered the bannered hall where the wedding banquet was prepared. It was noticed that, during the feast, a portrait detached itself from the wall, and fell with a sudden crash; the bride started and turned pale, nor was she reassured by observing that it was the founder's picture, ill-favoured and saturnine, which had caused her the momentary alarm. As the feast went on, however, the un-

toward accident was forgotten, and the gaiety and mirth increased as the generous wines began to circulate freely. The guests arose at length from the table, and wandered by twos and threes into the gardens amongst the clipped yew hedges and sundials, and stone flights of steps which adorned the stately pleasure grounds of the olden time. The splendid attire of the wedding company lent to the dark background of the scene a special charm. Their silks and satins shimmered in the water of the formal basins and canals, and glittered brightly in the sunlight, as the lords and ladies strolled and sauntered, or arranged themselves in Watteau-like groups at the foot of some statue or antique vase, adorned with cactus and stiff-leaved aloes. But several hours must still elapse before supper; many games were discussed and proposed to while away the lagging flight of time. Hide-and-seek at length secured a majority, and in a few minutes the bride disappeared like her of the 'Mistletoe Bough.' At a signal given, the company dispersed in search of her, with joyous cries of mirth and merriment.

The bridegroom, who had joined somewhat languidly in their amusement, as one after another came back unsuccessful from their search, threw himself with energy into the game. Accompanied by two of his friends, they re-entered the castle. They separated in the great hall, and agreed to meet there again at the expiration of half an hour. They flew into one room after another on the ground floor, looked behind the hangings of every window, lifted up each fold of the heavy tapestry which draped the walls, opened every buffet, every cabinet, every cupboard; they dived into the cellars, explored the buttery the kitchen, the dairy, even the stabling and

the rambling old coach-houses; at the half-hour's end each one re-appeared unsuccessful and alone. Edouard and Aimé, his two companions, noticed with secret apprehension the pallor that had replaced the bridegroom's ruddy hue, and the ill-repressed excitement of his manner. 'No luck yet,' he cried, as they approached. 'Now let us take the next storey, and meet again as before in the corridor above the hall.' They explored the sleeping-rooms; Albert even rushed into that of his mother and that prepared for his bride, and into all those occupied by the servants. His friends did the same, and in the ardour of their search opened every clothes-press, every chest, every wardrobe, moved every piece of furniture which could conceal a living form, and presently met again, fatigued and discouraged, to report each his lack of success. By degrees the rest of the company, wearied with their efforts, joined them one by one. Madame de St. Victor beheld them return with ill-concealed alarm. The mother of Athénais made no attempt to dissemble her agitation. The bridegroom in vain attempted to smile, and reassure them by suggesting they had scarcely yet been two hours at their pastime. Athénais might have fallen asleep in some alcove or shady spot, and forgotten the lapse of time. The company all redispersed for the third time, and cries were heard in the long galleries by way of signal that the game was over. The echoes seemed to multiply the sounds, and then to cause the silence to be more deeply felt. Presently they all returned to the great saloon, and indulged in speculations, which, as the day wore on, assumed a darker cast. The evening was falling of the long summer's day, when Albert returned from another and closer examina-

tion of every corner in the house. The servants were now despatched in every direction with torches and flambeaux through all the woods and gardens. She might, it was thought, have wandered beyond the precincts, or perhaps got lost in the forest, stretching far beyond the domain. The half-dried-up moat was jealously examined. Night was close on then, and every effort proved fruitless. The joyous mirth of the morning had vanished. Who could suggest any word of comfort to the bridegroom on his very nuptial night? Who could frame any words of consolation to the mother of the bride?—who, as if half stupefied, sat silently wringing her hands, and vainly trying to bring words to her parched lips, which refused to articulate.

It was getting late, and the wedding guests, overpowered by fatigue, dropped off to bed. But Albert, restless, passionate, despairing, continued his anxious movements without a moment's rest. Moment by moment he started up to explore some suddenly-remembered spot, some half-forgotten corner—to lift up, for the hundredth time, the heavy arras of the banqueting-room, and to utter cries of anguished longing as he passed up and down the passages like a spectral apparition. The night was wearing on: servants returned at intervals without tidings. The blank, cold dawn stole in on pale faces unrefreshed by sleep and sharpened by anxiety. Morning came—no Athénais. The dreadful suspense grew almost unbearable as the long, slow morning came and went without tidings. The interminable day dragged through its weary length. The ponds were searched; the forest far and near explored; the moat was re-examined; the castle again pried into from garret to basement; not

a nook remained into which jealous eyes had not made inquiry, and anxious feet explored. Words fail to describe the horrors of that unavailing seeking, as a blank despair settled down to a deeply-rooted conviction that some frightful, unknown doom or mischance had overtaken the bride. Besides, many hours had now elapsed. If she were living, she must be exhausted with want of food. Madame de Brélandcourt gave herself up to bursts of lamentation inexpressibly heart-rending, for no comfort seemed at hand for such an unforeseen calamity; while of Albert, who shall depict the despair? Lost—it seemed a doom too dreadful! People muttered together of the ill-omened fall of Raoul's picture; and gossips shook their heads over dark tales of murder and misadventure, which, doubtless, seemed to them to have some special relation to the matter in hand. A silence chill as the grave, an appalling maze, in which imagination wandered and was lost, fell upon and surrounded the inhabitants of the castle, of which the dark-eyed Athénais was never to be the mistress. Nor have we here space to relate how conviction slowly changed into certainty of absolute loss; nor how the blithe and blooming youth of Albert withered and pined into haggard and premature old age. He seemed alike unable to quit the scene of his calamity, or divert his mind from what became at length a brooding mania, beneath the blight of which his mind gradually gave way. With what eyes, with what heart-pangs his mother watched this slow decay, may better be imagined than described! He died, not many years after, a haggard spectre of his once bright self, a restless shadow of his charming youth, a

broken-hearted, haunted, miserable man.

His mother followed him to the grave. The mother of Athénais hid herself and her woes in the neighbouring convent of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows. The castle, disused and partly dismantled, was shut up, and fell into the hands of an ex-farmer-general, who, disturbed by the Revolution, never ventured either to survey or explore his new possession. The great towers were fired by the peasantry on a night which saw half the castles of Provence in a blaze. Nettles grew over the blackened ruins; the moat was choked with the broken stones and beams which fell into it; bats and owls wheeled in solitary circles about the deserted battlements, or woke dreary echoes as they flapped against the broken casements, or nested in the ivy which grew dark and dense upon the time-worn walls. A bad mystery shrouded the house; an evil reputation clung around it. The story of Athénais—traditions of her beauty and her grace—lingered long about the hamlet. A figure resembling hers was said to haunt the battlements at night, attired in a robe of filmy white, and recognised by the diamond glitter on neck and brow—the marriage-gifts of Albert de St. Victor. By degrees even this tale died away, and a sombre blackness of decay enveloped all that remained of the mouldering turrets of La Guillotière. The rusty doors seldom creaked upon their hinges to admit a visitant, and a wholesome dread of *les revenants* scared the village youth from pilfering or overmuch prying about the dusty magnificence of the state-rooms, where the arras still clung to the walls (which had escaped the fires of the Revolution), and the goblinsque array of old portraits

still looked down with portentous frown and stony gravity on any rash intruder upon their mouldering calm.

CHAPTER II.

My readers will, I foresee, instantly accuse me of re-writing the well-worn tale of the 'Mistletoe Bough,' so exquisitely told, and as they hoped for the last time, in Mr. Roger's 'Italy.' I can only say in self-defence that the present narrative is strictly founded on the real history of a French family—names and dates, of course, being altered—which some time ago reached my hands, and of which I saw no reason to doubt the authenticity.

It was a bright spring day in the April of 186— when a party of young travellers from Germany visited La Guillotière. Bertha, a flaxen-haired and discreet maiden, Max and Fritz from the University of Bonn, an elderly and spectacled aunt, and little Hans, brother of Bertha—a gay and joyous company. They scattered themselves about the ruined walls, and sought to scare each other, as they went, by repeating the castle legend with that sort of vague belief which the scene of the occurrence never fails to inspire in the least imaginative of minds.

'Wert thou lost thus, Bertha mine,' says Max of the yellow moustache, looking tenderly into his cousin's blue eyes, 'I should have pulled the castle down stone by stone, but left it never till thou wert rediscovered.'

But Bertha responded with a merry laugh, and declined to place herself even in imagination in the place of the lost bride.

'Let us two play at hide-and-seek; 'tis the very place,' said little Hans. 'Perhaps we may



Drawn by Dower Wilson.]

THE BRIDAL OF LA GUILLOTINE.

'Seated in a faded arm-chair, a Figure confronted him.'

find the white lady herself,' and the child's eyes grew wider at the supposition thus conjured up.

'Go hide, thou little fool,' said the grave Max, 'and in five minutes or so we will seek for thee.' And he drew his cousin's hand under his arm as he spoke.

But little Hans stoutly declined to be the first victim, and Max himself, goaded thereto by the tongue of Bertha, was bidden himself to disappear. He vanished into the castle, and went up the somewhat dangerous staircase to the picture-gallery above. There, hidden behind some mouldering tapestry, he heard his companions pass the place of his concealment with loud exclamations of wonderment at not finding him. He came out again as they passed, and noticed in a corner of the saloon an ancient worm-eaten cabinet, curiously carved, but too perished to be worth removal. He pulled out a drawer or two with a young man's vague curiosity. They were empty, having, indeed, been many times ransacked by idlers as curious as himself. He managed, prompted by a sudden impulse, to push it a little from the wall, and as he did so sounded the wainscot with his hand. A piece of the panel detached itself and fell dustily upon the ground, and behind—yes, there could be no manner of doubt—was a door, so accurately made and fitted into the wall that nothing but a tiny metallic knob betrayed the secret so long unrevealed. This, then, so it suddenly flashed across him, must be the entry to the secret chamber. He, Max, would be the first to enter—the first to discover whatever that chamber might reveal. He trembled with excitement, the dew stood in great beads on his brow. He pressed the steel spring with faltering hand. It yielded

to his touch. He found himself in a tiny, narrow, dark passage leading into a large vaulted apartment. A dusty and obscure atmosphere, foul and oppressive with the close air of centuries, stifled him as he entered and stood on the threshold in the doubtful light. Great heavens! what was this?—*this*, which petrified his gaze, and sent the blood from his heart as he shaded his eyes, and peered beneath their cover into the blinding atmosphere. At the table in the centre of the room, seated in a faded arm-chair, a Figure confronted him—a figure blackened, fleshless, awful, but preserving enough of the semblance of humanity to convince him that the lost bride of La Guillotière was she, whose stiffened stare from ghastly orbits had almost turned him into stone. The bones were just held in some sort together by the remnants of the dress—once, evidently, white satin, but now darkly powdered with awful dust. Masses of rich dark hair were tumbled in splendid profusion over the withered, fleshless frame. Diamonds flashing and glittering with dreadful lustre from the neck, the wrists, the head of the apparition, added, if anything could add, to the intensity of the horror before him. He drew nearer, though his tongue, parched and dry, clave to his mouth, and the dew burst out on his forehead. On the skeleton hand a ring; on the table a morsel of paper—something in dim red characters scrawled on it with a jewelled pin; on the feet high-pointed shoes with glittering buckles; round the withered throat, pearls, whose exquisite shimmer of soft beauty lent an indescribable touch of dismay to the sickening dread with which the young man faced the spectacle before him.

His first impulse was to rush

in headlong hurry back along the little passage, to find—that the door had sprung and locked, and that the fate of Athénais de Bré-lancourt had overtaken him! Imprisoned was he too truly, past mortal succour, in this living tomb, already tenanted by this ghastly remnant of mortality!

It was evident that, in his impatient eagerness, he had allowed the door to close, which it had done on noiseless hinges, without attracting his observation; and his mind woke to the conviction that he was lost as surely, as certainly, and as hopelessly as Athénais, whose stony stare seemed to wither him as he stood. To his excited imagination, suddenly overwrought by the dreadful discovery he had made, it seemed as if the tenant of the chair were bending forward as if to speak. What would she say? Should he listen and become the depositary of a secret which something in the disposition of the wasted and shrivelled limbs had suggested to his mind, viz., that hunger and the slow torments of starvation had caused her to *gnaw her arm*? The blood surged madly in his brain as the new terror seized upon him, and Max, utterly unnerved, fell upon the floor in a swoon. When after an interval his senses returned, the closeness and oppression of the death-laden atmosphere, the smothering dust and stifling air, almost prevented his breathing. He again tried the door, shook, beat, and clamoured with all his remaining force. He bent his ear anxiously to the panel: no sound reached it. He became assured that in the great saloon the walls had been so constructed, by a fiendish ingenuity, that nothing should ever betray the existence of that dreary chamber to the rest of the castle. He again entered the chamber,

and, becoming gradually accustomed to the uncertain light, began cautiously to grope about the apartment. It appeared furnished in some sort with a dim and faded magnificence; carved chairs and tables of antique workmanship were ranged against the wall; some rare glass goblets, one or two of them broken; a bureau of ebony, from the drawers of which a few gold pieces fell chinking out; a dim mirror, clouded with dust, which reflected, as he passed it, a face so haggard, peaked and worn, that it gave him a fresh throb of apprehension. Like a spectral apparition he beheld it meet his gaze—could this be himself?

The room was lighted by a window near the vaulted ceiling. With a sudden impulse he flung his stick up, and, after many efforts, succeeded in breaking a pane of glass, which fell in with a little crash. A waft of fresher air coming in roused him somewhat, and he began to consider more calmly if any possibilities of escape lay before him. Gradually overcoming his shrinking horror of the figure in the chair, he drew another seat nearer to the table, and endeavoured to read the scrawled lines on the scrap of paper he had noticed before. They were scarcely decipherable, but he fancied he could make out *hunger, thirst, and My God have mercy on me!*

It was evident they had been written with a drop of blood by the jewelled and blackened and shrivelled hand which yet rested upon the paper—written by the last effort of expiring life before death seized upon his prey. His eyes remained riveted upon the figure with a horrible fascination. Conceive his dismay when, by a slight movement having shaken the room a little, a bone of the

grisly arm detached itself from the mouldering sleeve, and fell abhorrently upon the floor!—the glittering stones of the costly bracelet flashing resplendently as it lay at his feet. A cold sweat broke out anew on the young man's forehead; trembling in every limb in spite of himself, he fled to the farthest corner of the apartment, hiding his face as he did so in an agony of uncontrollable dread. His watch pointed to eight o'clock, and a keen sensation of hunger began to make itself felt, over and above the nervous excitement which had hitherto strung his limbs and stimulated his brain. From time to time he roused himself to beat at the panel, and raised his voice in loud outcries—or what he fancied were such, for his throat was dried and parched. No sound came; no echo even, still less reply. The silence deepened—became intense, appalling, as the dim light gradually faded—and in the gathering gloom the Horror in the chair seemed to take larger proportions, and put on a more repellent ghastliness. Night came on—utter darkness! A nameless terror seized him that the Thing would rise, and come across the room and touch him where he had flung himself upon the floor. But at last, overcome by hunger and faintness, he slept the restless slumber of exhaustion, perturbed by hideous dreams.

He woke with the morning sun streaming through the broken pane, and turned his pockets inside out. Nothing but a few crumbs of biscuit rewarded his search, and in his flask a few drops of wine remained—not enough, indeed, to allay or satisfy his thirst; and with this phantom of a meal he strove to forget the gnawing hunger which in reality overmastered every other feeling

of which he was conscious. Morning passed, hour by hour—noon; the intensity of the silence and the oppression of the atmosphere seemed alike to deepen and increase. He was growing sick and faint. He sat cowering in a corner of the room, as far off as possible from the white and diamonded figure in the chair—from which nevertheless his eyes never wandered, drawn by an irresistible fascination. A vague, fantastic wonder, bordering on delirium, took possession of his mind as to whether It would speak and break the haunting silence; and if so, how well it would beguile the heavy time, to know the real history of that long-passed bridal. Then starting up, he would ever and again exhaust his failing strength in efforts to detach or break the panelling, and by that means aid his escape. Towards evening he felt himself becoming unconscious; but after a long interval he fancied he heard a slight rustle in the apartment. Rallying his senses with a great effort, he gazed about him with starting eyes. It was a cat, which had apparently leapt through the broken pane and was now rushing hurriedly about the room. What if she should spring on *that* chair, and cause the occupant to move?—the idea paralysed his enfeebled brain. Rousing himself to call her, she at length approached him; but after a while enduring his caresses, she sprang from his arms, and leaping from the furniture to the cornice, gained the broken hole again and vanished. His whole and only hope now was, would she return?—and by her return excite or awaken suspicion as to his whereabouts? Night came, and, utterly exhausted, he again lay down and fell into the deep slumber that accompanies utter prostration of body and mind.

In the early dawn he was roused by something nestling soft and warm against his breast. His brain stung to action by a sudden thought, he fastened his neckerchief round the creature's neck. It leapt away, and vanished as before. His senses now quite dulled by faintness, he again sank upon the floor, and was dimly conscious, through the vague delirium whirling in his mind, of being closely watched by the phantom figure in the chair.

* * * * *

My tale is nearly ended. Beset with a dreadful agony of apprehension, our travellers had consumed the day with unavailing efforts to discover their companion. A sleepless night ensued, and they rose early next morning to renew their anxious search. Bertha was the first to perceive the cat springing about the battlements, and to discover, with a frantic heart-beat, its unwonted adornment. She entreated the shy, wild creature with every wile of endearment to approach her. Little Hans at last, with a sudden dart, succeeded in seizing it. They tore the handkerchief off. It bore the well-known initials of the lost Max; but where, in Heaven's name, they asked each other with eager hope, was he? Would the creature which had thus, as it were, brought tidings, return to the place of the lost one's concealment? The cat, however, watched by an anxiety so poignant, entreated, adjured, caressed, appeared solely occupied for the rest of the day in chasing butterflies, lapping milk, and dozing peacefully in the midday sun. As the evening approached, the creature became distractingly lively, bounding hither and thither, and at last, followed by the whole party, it sprang away on a rampant, and apparently aimless, career about the crumbling walls.

The broken aperture through which it at last disappeared betrayed the secret. Scaling ladders and ropes were hastily procured. Leaping down with their assistance, Fritz found himself in the chamber, and stumbled over his brother's prostrate and, to all appearance, insensible figure.

The suffocation and oppression of the room affected him strangely—the horror of the situation, the doubtful light, and the delay which ensued before further assistance could arrive. At last, startled by an oath and an exclamation, he turned round as a young peasant descended the ladder, and saw by the light he carried, the secret of the chamber revealed. It seemed to his excited and overwrought imagination as if the grave had suddenly opened before him, as all that was mortal of *Athénais de Brélandcourt* confronted their gaze. And even as they were gazing, riveted with horror, upon the spectacle before them, the figure, shaken by the shock of their rude entry, slowly collapsed, and fell in one dreadful heap of ruin upon the floor!

The dress, which had hitherto, in the undisturbed state of the atmosphere, sufficed to hold together the perishing ligaments, crumbled into dust; the glittering diamonds' costly spoil, and the mouldering remnants of decay, lay ghastly confused together; while the fleshless skull, with its dark tresses, rolled a little farther towards them. They started back with a loud outcry, appalled by an indescribable terror; nor was it for several seconds that they could rouse themselves sufficiently to support the sufferer's limbs, and steady themselves with their burden, so as to gain the summit of the ladder.

How long an interval elapsed before the dreadful swoon passed

away—how long before reason, shaken on her throne, resumed her sway—how long before the limbs, wasted and worn by that terrific ordeal of hunger, regained their vigour, we have left ourselves no space to relate. Suffice it to say, that though years have rolled away, and Max and Bertha have long been happy in the uneventful calm of married peace, no persuasion, no entreaty, no caresses will ever unseal his lips, even to the children on his knee, to tell the story of the Lost Bride of La Guillotière, and those terrific hours spent in the awful company of the dead.

The village authorities, it is said, entered the castle, and with

some solemnity caused the sad remnants of Athénais to be gathered together and laid with the ancestors of her husband in the little church of La Guillotière. Funeral masses were sung for the repose of her soul with pious care. Whilst a vivid curiosity, stung to shuddering pity, leads the stranger to the tomb wherein her ashes lie, the withered crone who conducts his footsteps, chills him to the bone by her sybilline recital of that sad tale of love and beauty, and its fierce contrast of despair, and anguish, and lingering death.

A single line is her epitaph :—

‘SPES PERDITA.’

O. S. T. D.



A CHRISTMAS CAROL.



Drawn by C. W. Morgan.

THE TRIUMPH OF LUCIFER.

(LUCIFER *loquitur.*)

FORTH from the gates of Heaven, uncompelled,
 Of my mere grace I come : be mists dispelled
 At my fair presence ! Thou lone earth, long held
 By night, know now thy lord ; too long hast thou rebelled !

Behold, thou earth, scarce waking from sad dreams,
 How mildly in the gold-green heaven beams
 Mine own sweet star, and how in all the streams
 She mirrors her, and say what worship me beseems ?

Oh, earth unwitting ! am not I the light ?
 Bow down thyself, and give me now my right !
 For, lo, I come to aid thee in my might :
 Yield me my meed withheld by traitorous despoite !

Night flees apace, and in this silent time,
 When naught is heard except the subtle chime
 Of those high spheres that tune with mystic rhyme
 All things to order ; bow before my face sublime !

What, oh thou earth, to thee is that fell king
 Who must come after me, awakening
 Thee to much toil and labour ? Lo, I sing
 Of ease ; be wise, enjoy what Lucifer doth bring !

I am fulfilling of thy heart's desire !
 I, the Bringer of light, the Lord of fire !
 Answer me, all ye stars, mine own bright choir,
 Is there a height whereto my spirit may not aspire ?

(CHORUS OF THE STARS.)

Yea, Lucifer, thy triumph now begun
 Must pause awhile,
 When that all-wakening, toil-compelling sun
 Doth rise and smile
 Upon the pleasant rolling of the waves
 That tempt the sons of earth to hidden graves,
 And on the fields wet with the tears of slaves,
 On weariness and guile.

Yet rule, oh, Prince ! until the sun arise
 Rule thou the air,
 On thee the voice of nature ever cries,
 She fain would share
 The splendour of thy state, nor seeks to aught
 That may assail thy throne ; thy ways are sought
 By all on earth, and heaven's sons have caught
 The shout that names thee fair.

Oh, morning star, we hail thee as the king
 Of Heaven's powers !
 The glory and the praise of all that sing
 From Heaven's towers :
 Go forth all-conquering, as long as fame
 Shall trumpet thee by that thy chiefest name,
 Rule, oh thou Lord of fire, while thy bright flame
 Illumines endless hours !

B. MONTGOMERIE RANKING.

THE BANSHEE'S WARNING.

'How oft has the banshee cried!
How oft has death untied
Bright links that glory wove,
Sweet bonds entwined by love!' THOMAS MOORE.

ONE dull December evening, arriving in London from Portsmouth, I took the shortest way towards the West-End, in which quarter of the town an aunt and sister of mine resided.

I intended spending Christmas with them at the house of a friend in Lincolnshire, which I generally did when I happened to be in England at this time; so that I hoped not only to have the pleasure of seeing them shortly, but also that of their company down.

As I passed through the different streets on my route, I noted the various preparations for the approaching Christmas; but they failed to awaken in me those pleasurable sensations which they usually arouse: in their stead was a sickening presentiment of coming evil, though in what form or from what quarter it would come I felt alike ignorant.

It is said that 'coming events cast their shadows before;' and I knew that a shadow was upon me then, as dark and drear as the sky above me, and do what I would I could not shake it off.

This presentiment will not appear so unreasonable when I explain a little, to do which it will be necessary to mention a few particulars respecting myself and family.

I was the youngest son of an Irish family formerly living in the north-west of Ireland. There were five of us, all speaking brogues as thick as the fog that lost mother Maloney in the bog.

When Norah and I were still very young, my three brothers went abroad one after another, consequently we were the only children left to my father to make anything like a home for him.

Our mother had been dead some time, and the care of us had devolved upon an old woman who had been in the family for years, and who was as fond of us as if we had been her own.

It is well known that the peasantry of the west of Ireland retain more of the customs and superstitions of the early Irish than that of the other portions of the island; this may result from their having had less intercourse with their English neighbours.

It was among these people and still wilder surroundings that our childhood was passed, listening to and becoming familiar with the wild legends current among them, which we believed in as firmly as we did the earth we trod, or the air we breathed.

But it was from our old nurse that we first heard of the 'good people,' as the fairies are called in Ireland; and in the long winter evenings, when the snow lay thick outside, Norah and I would sit in the glow of the turf-fire while she told us weird stories of the Pookah and the Banshee, till we fancied we heard the mournful cry of the last, mingling with the moaning of the wind as it swept over the bleak hills that lay in the rear of our house.

The belief in the Banshee is now so generally known that I presume any explanations I might offer here with regard to it would only prove unnecessary. The first time I ever heard it was late one dreary winter's night. I was waiting for my father, who had been away since early morning. As I sat listening intently, imagining often I distinguished his horse's hoofs coming over the frozen ground, my brain filled with strange fancies, and a vague fear benumbing my senses, the stillness, which had seemed to grow more awful each moment, was suddenly broken by the mournful cry—which once heard is never to be forgotten—the dreaded voice of the Banshee.

My father never came home that night; but he was discovered next morning at some little distance from the house quite dead; and his horse, which it is supposed had stumbled and thrown him, standing by him whinnying.

After this sad event our home of course was quite broken up. Norah went to live with a rich aunt in London, while, through the interest of some of my father's friends, a berth was obtained for me on board the *Daphne*. At the time my story opens I no longer sported the middy's short jacket, but was happy in the dignity conferred by a tailcoat and odd epaulette when worn in the Queen's service.

Remembering well my father's death and the strange warning that preceded it, my very blood was chilled when I heard the Banshee for the second time one dark night as we stood up the Channel. What did the mystic voice portend? I only knew that as surely as the shadow proclaims the presence of an object from which it derives its being, so surely was it the forerunner of some evil; what, I could not know yet, though come I felt it must, and that all I could

do would neither prevent nor defer it.

My mind given over to reflection of a most gloomy character, I arrived at my aunt's house, but only to learn from the housekeeper that Miss Norah and Miss O'Hara had gone down to Lincolnshire the week before, and that young Mr. Leyton had come up for the express purpose of escorting them thither. I bore my disappointment with as good a grace as possible; and as there was nothing for it but to wait till the morrow and take the early coach, I sat down in front of a fire which my coming had given life to, and read some letters which I found awaiting me, while tea was being prepared for me.

The letters were from my aunt and friend respectively, and were both to the effect that Fergus O'Hara—my respected self—would transport himself to Leyton Hall at the first possible opportunity; which I of course fully intended to do.

Harry Leyton and I were old and fast friends, though we saw each other rarely, and this friendship, which was no common one, his engagement to Norah tended to strengthen; and I did hope that in the future another tie might be added which would cement it still more closely.

I first made his acquaintance through my aunt, at whose house he used to be a frequent visitor. He was a handsome young fellow, had studied for the Bar, and was then making some little name.

I felt rather solitary partaking of my meal alone; the room which to another's eyes would have no doubt appeared cheerful enough seemed desolate to me, myself the only tenant, where I had expected to see Norah's pretty person and my dear old aunt.

My meal over, I thought an early retreat to bed the best means

of disposing of the remainder of a miserable evening, and of securing a good night's rest, as I should be forced to rise early to be in time for the coach.

I arrived at Leyton Hall early in the evening of the following day.

'Well, old fellow,' said Harry, bursting into the apartment which I had been shown into, and which was to be mine during my stay, 'I'm glad you're come at last. Here,' giving a look round, 'let me take your traps into my room till that fire looks a little brighter;' and suiting the action to the word he seized upon as many articles as he could conveniently transport there, in spite of my remonstrances. I was not long in making my toilette, when we went to the drawing-room together.

The scene which met my eyes was indeed a happy one, and well worthy of the season which had occasioned it, and speedily banished the dark fears which had oppressed me during the past few days.

The guests were as numerous as they appeared happy. Norah and my aunt were delighted to see me, and Sir Henry and Lady Leyton gave me as warm a welcome as I could have desired. All this time there was a young lady, with red flowers in her hair, who was unaware, or pretended to be so, of my presence, till Harry apprising her of it, she rose from the piano, at which she had been playing, to greet me. The vivid blush that dyed her fair face at sight of me, and the pretty look of surprise that accompanied it, made her appear more charming and bewitching than I had ever before seen her.

She resumed her seat at the instrument, and took up the verse of a ballad which my approach had interrupted. When it was finished I selected some old favourites of mine, and requested her to sing them, which she did; thus listen-

ing, and talking in the pauses of the songs, I passed one of the happiest hours it is ever permitted a mortal to enjoy.

The next morning at breakfast a ball was planned for the same evening; and as the time for the proper decoration of the large dining-hall in which it was principally to take place was rather short, all hands were pressed into the service.

There is no season like Christmas for making people sociable. All seemed to enter heart and soul into the spirit of the thing, and showed the greatest interest in what was going forward. Even the two Miss Mills, a couple of unusually crabbed spinsters, who rarely relaxed from their grim frigidity, became quite genial under its influence, much to the astonishment of everybody; which so affected a short, puffy old gentleman, a neighbour of theirs, who was nailing up holly hard by them, that he either made a joke or paid a compliment to the younger of the ladies in question. I am inclined to think it was the latter, for the elder Miss Mills seemed slightly resentful to her sister for some little time afterwards.

Well, at last, after a great deal of laughing and talking and directing, a great deal of hammering and noise, the immense piles of green which the servants had been constantly bringing in were transferred from the floor to the dark panelled walls, where the pictures looked out from their annual frames of scarlet and green. There was not an available spot where holly could be put that we did not put it—swords were wreathed with it, helmits were crowned with it; and the fire, blazing and crackling on the hearth, glinted on the ancient breastplates and headpieces through the friendly branches of the holly and mistletoe.

When I entered the ballroom in the evening, it really presented a most pleasing and splendid appearance, and we were well repaid for the labours of the morning. The wax tapers, which were plentifully distributed throughout the apartment, shed a brilliant though soft light over the happy scene.

The gaiety around me was so contagious that I grew infected with it, and, casting care and dark thoughts to the winds, I entered on the pleasures of the evening with full determination to enjoy them.

I had just ended a careful survey of the company, to discover if Harry's sister were yet present, when I espied her in the doorway, a vision of loveliness to remember. She was attired in a soft creamy-tinted material, with crimson flowers in her hair—the flowers in her hair were always red, the colour, I suppose, became her best.

From the centre of the oak ceiling a huge bough of mistletoe depended, which was the cause of much fun and amusement. No sooner did any unwary maiden wander beneath it than some cavalier, instantly taking advantage of the occasion thus offered, claimed the legal kiss, when would ensue struggles of resistance, either assumed or real, which called forth such shouts of laughter as made the old room ring again.

Alice I could have kissed several times, but I lacked both courage and inclination to do so. Alice's manner had been very cold towards me during the few minutes that I was allowed to enjoy her society; for directly the dancing commenced I saw little of her. I was no proficient in the Terpsichorean art myself.

I was the more surprised and gratified, then, when she came over

to me and said, with a very sweet smile, 'Don't you dance, Fergus?'

'No,' I replied, wishing with all my heart I could give a different answer—'or at least,' I hastened to add, 'very indifferently.'

'Which means that you are afraid of being laughed at, did you make the attempt,' she returned mischievously.

'Not at all; but though I do not object to making myself food for mirth on an especial occasion like the present, I should greatly regret having rendered a lady such.'

'O, if that is your scruple lay it aside for once; and as I fear a laugh as little as you do, accept my guidance through the next quadrille. You must—every one is dancing to-night.'

Though she laughed as she said this, the real kindness intended was unmistakable. What could I do but yield? So when the next dance was forming we rose; and with the knowledge I had unconsciously gained from watching others, and the whispered directions and signs she favoured me with, I acquitted myself very creditably.

Once during the evening I found myself quite alone with Alice, when I put a question to her which I had had it in my heart to ask so long; and the answer she made me gave me the right to kiss her without being under the mistletoe.

It was late when I reached my room that night; but feeling no desire to sleep I opened my window, and, leaning out, smoked a cigar.

The room I occupied was in the left wing of the house, its one window looking on to a broad terrace from which a handsome flight of steps led down to the beech avenue. The snow, which had fallen heavily all day, had

nearly ceased; only a few stray feathery flakes slowly descended on the white carpet beneath, while in the air that strange stillness reigned which a snowstorm always produces.

I stood watching the patches of light thrown from the windows along the terrace disappear one by one, till, my second cigar being finished, I went to bed. I had been to sleep about two hours, as far as I could judge, when I awoke suddenly with the conviction that some one had pronounced my name. I listened: all was silent. I spoke aloud: there was no answer; and by the imperfect light I could see that there was no one in the room.

I was just about to lay my head on the pillow again, persuading myself that I had been the victim of my own imagination, when close beside me arose a low wailing cry; it was so mournful, so weird, that I had not an instant's doubt as to its identity. 'The Banshee!' I cried, starting from the bed, all my old horror returned and intensified; but the words had scarcely left my lips ere a shadow passed the window. I sprang towards it, the sound dying away as I did so. At first I could see nothing unusual outside to attract my attention; but after a keen survey, I discerned a tall shadowy form moving in a direction opposite to the house. I put my hand over my eyes: was I mad or dreaming? I knew I was neither.

When I looked again it had reached the avenue, where, though farther off, I could distinguish it more clearly, the dark tree-trunks offering a better background than the snow. It continued to flit among the tree shadows for some time, when it seemed to vanish altogether.

My first impulse, though I did not act upon it, was to rush out

into the air, and penetrate, if I could, the mystery that enshrouded me. I waited long in the hope that the spectre might return; but this hope I was forced to abandon, when the gray light of a winter's morning began to steal into my chamber; I seemed to have lost all conception of time. Then I threw myself on the bed dressed as I was, and, thoroughly exhausted, fell into a dreamless sleep.

It was late when I awoke. The day wore slowly, even tediously on, in my anxiety for the night to arrive; for then I had determined to wait on or near the spot where I had lost sight of the figure on the preceding night.

I spoke to no one of the dread forebodings I was a prey to, not even Norah; for she I knew held the same beliefs as myself, and I was unwilling to cause her any uneasiness; but I tried, though fruitlessly, to learn whether she had received any warning of the evils which I felt the future held for one or both of us.

It was the greatest possible relief to me when the daylight began to give out, and night to spread its dark curtain over the sky. The state of suspense I was in was unendurable; even Alice's dear voice, as she sang my favourite airs, seemed to have lost something of its charm—for the time at least—and her smile the magic power to cheer me. But I never left her so reluctantly, or with such a heavy heart, as when we parted for the night; for the long hours were before me in which, something whispered, I should be an actor in some terrible drama.

Once in my room, I sat over the fire till it boasted but a few dull embers, my brain busily engaged with the events of the past night. By my watch it wanted a quarter to one, when I arose, wrapped a boat-cloak round me,

and taking a pistol which I had placed in readiness, and opening the window as quietly as possible, dropped out on to the terrace, where the snow lay so thick that my footsteps were rendered almost inaudible.

I soon reached the spot which I intended making my post of observation, and, screening myself from view among the trees, I waited the issue of events. There was a moon, though not a bright one. The wind, which moaned in the distance, swept by in cold biting blasts, shaking the leafless branches overhead, and causing me to shudder involuntarily and draw my cloak close about me for warmth.

I remained in this position for some time, and had almost given up the idea of again seeing the phantom, when, on looking towards the hall, I became conscious of its dim form stealing along the terrace. With a terrible anxiety I watched its stealthy progress, trying to descry its features—if features it had—till the fixedness of my gaze made the space before me black, and forced me to rest my aching sight.

When I watched it again, it had passed all the windows on one side of the terrace, with the exception of one, which was mine; a second or two, and it had reached it; it stopped, and disappeared within.

The chill of horror which crept over me at this circumstance I could not describe; it seemed to numb my brain and deprive me of the power to act. But not for long. Soon the hot blood came surging through my veins, till I felt like one in a fever. I left my place of concealment, hurried along the avenue, up the steps, along the terrace, dreading yet longing for the moment that would reveal to me the unbidden occupant of my apartment. I found my win-

dow open, as I had left it; my first quick glance inside discovered nothing. With my pistol ready I was preparing to enter, when a sudden clutch was laid upon me—something confronted me, and I fired full at it.

A low groan, horribly human, followed the report. I sprang into the window; beneath it, close against the wall, crouched or huddled an object. I stooped hastily to examine it, and saw what made me faint and sick with fear and remorse—Harry's face, white and still.

It was New-year's-eve, when the oak dining-hall, and the guests assembled there, were looking their brightest and gayest, while Harry, with his arm still in a sling, was being made much of by the company in general, and Norah and myself in particular.

Some days had elapsed since I had mistaken poor Harry, in a *fit* of somnambulism, for a genuine ghost—when by a mad act I narrowly escaped depriving him of his life and myself of all future happiness. Why he had unconsciously taken the same course on the two successive occasions was fully explained by what he afterwards told me.

A certain Sir Eustace Leyton, an ancestor of Harry's, who owned the Hall in the time of the Parliamentary wars, being at one particular period forced to leave it somewhat scantily garrisoned, caused a great part of the household silver to be placed in a chest, and buried in a spot known only to himself and a select few. There were rumours afloat to the effect that this silver had remained buried ever since; which rumours, Harry, having the curious chance to come across an old document seeming to refer, though indefinitely, to the place where the treasure

was deposited, had begun to give some little credence to, though they were generally accounted as among the many improbable stories connected with the old mansion.

It was just upon twelve when we threw open the window to hear the bells ring out the old year and usher in the new—the New Year that might have been so dark, yet which promised so much happiness for some of us. Standing by Alice, I looked out on the moon-

light scene. Our window commanded the long double-line of beeches; and as I watched the weird shadows their branches cast on the frost-bound ground beneath as the wind swayed them, a certain night was brought so vividly to my mind that I could almost fancy the Banshee's warning voice still filling my ears.

I have lived many happy years since that time, and I have never once heard it. I can't help hoping that I never shall.



BEHIND THE SCENES IN LONDON SOCIETY.

I. THE GHOSTS OF LONDON MIDNIGHT.

It was in the neighbourhood of the Old Kent-road—for reasons which will presently appear I should be scarcely justified in more particularly specifying its whereabouts—that I was glad to come in view of the twinkling lamps of one of those friendly havens of refreshment and refuge which gladden the heart of the nocturnal pedestrian—a public coffee-booth.

Any man might, under the circumstances, have been glad. The night—or rather the early morning, for it was nearly two o'clock—was black and bleak, and there was a drenching drizzle of rain falling. I have nothing to say for or against the beverage which was served steaming hot from the can under which a ruddy charcoal fire burnt briskly, further than to remark that it would be hardly reasonable to expect a decoction of first-rate Mocha at the rate of a penny the full half-pint. At that untimely hour, however, and in such bitterly cold weather, we were, I have no doubt, all of us grateful for a drink of it: 'all of us' consisting of a policeman, two sisters of misfortune, and a white-faced hollow-cheeked man, wearing a tall black hat much the worse for wear, and a dilapidated black coat tightly buttoned up to his chin, and further remarkable by exhibiting, by accident I believe, the end of a flute sticking out between the buttoning at the breast. As for the coffee-stall keeper himself, he was not the kind of person whose cheerful mien gave an additional

relish to the viands he dispensed. On the contrary, he was, although not an old or even elderly man, one who, judging from his saturnine aspect, had 'supped full' of worldly disappointment, which seemed to lead him into the strange habit of attentively regarding his customers when they were unaware of it, as though he were an experimental chemist, and anxious to see the effect on them of a 'dose' furtively introduced into their coffee-cup. There was bread-and-butter and cake on his hospitable board, and I was about to help myself to a slice of the former when he stayed my hand.

'Have cake instead,' he remarked, in a moody whisper: 'it makes no difference to me; but that's my advice.'

'I prefer bread-and-butter,' I replied.

'Enough said, then,' and he shrugged his shoulders, in intimation of his perfect indifference in the matter. 'If you like it, have it. Don't say I didn't mention it, that's all. Don't take a bite at it, and then declare that you can't eat it and won't pay for it, because it isn't the best Aylesbury. It won't run to the best Aylesbury at a ha'penny a slice.'

He gave utterance to these jerky remarks with so much asperity that I had it at my tongue's tip to mildly rebuke him for his unjust insinuations. Next moment, however, I was glad I had not done so.

'Them that can't eat such bread-and-butter as that ought to know what it is to be real hungry; what do *you* say, Emma?'

Thus spoke one of the women already mentioned; and in reply said her companion, with so earnest a shake of her head that the rain that had saturated the flowers in her blowsy bonnet was sprinkled with a hiss on the charcoal fire,

'Lord A'mighty! you may well say that, lass; I'd be glad of the chance of tucking into as much as I liked just now!'

Without a word the sour-visaged coffee-stall keeper turned about, and, producing from a little cupboard five slices which evidently had been once bitten and summarily rejected by dissatisfied customers, he proceeded to distribute them. He gave two each to the women, and then, holding the remaining slice between his finger and thumb, looked askance towards the dilapidated owner of the flute. The latter was quick at divining his meaning.

'Sooner than it should go begging, I don't care if I do,' said he, with something of a laugh and a wink round on the company generally, as though he wished it to be understood that he took the bread for the mere fun of the thing. He lost no time in disposing of it, however: folding it over in three, as one folds a sheet of note-paper for the envelope, his mouth received it, and in an instant it had vanished. By this time I was convinced that the coffee-stall keeper was an uncommon man of his class. I therefore ordered another cup of his coffee, for the sake of lingering there; his other customers had taken their departure. The policeman, helping himself to a couple of lumps of sugar (he had not paid for his coffee and cake), was the last to go.

'You must witness some strange phases of life,' I ventured to remark to the coffee-man, now that

the coast was clear. 'You no doubt have opportunities of seeing and conversing with people of a kind that the daylight world has no idea even of the existence of.'

He had commenced to wash up his cups and saucers when I began to address him, and he paused with a half-wiped cup and a towel in his hands to regard me with a look of surprise not, as I thought, unmixed with suspicion.

'Is that an old idea of yours,' he presently asked, 'or has it just now come into your head?'

I replied that it was a reflection that might occur to any one, and that I hoped my giving utterance to it gave him no offence.

'But what I should like to know,' said he, desisting entirely from his occupation and folding his arms on his counter—'what I should like to know is, what might be your opinion of what a man should do with the queer kind of knowledge he might pick up in the way you are speaking of, supposing he got together a whole lot of it?'

I told him that there was but one way of doing justice to a mass of material such as he spoke of, and that was to put it in book-form and get it published.

'Make a volume of it, you mean, I suppose?' said he correctly.

'Exactly.'

'Do you think *you* could do it? Come now; supposing that you has my opportunities, do you think you could?'

'Possibly not; but still—'

'You couldn't,' he interrupted me, in a positive tone; 'you might think that you could, but you couldn't.'

'But what makes you so positive?'

'Because,' he replied, sinking his voice to a grim whisper—'because I've tried it.'

'And failed?'

'And failed,' he repeated impressively; 'so now you know what sort of chance you'd have.'

After such unimpeachable testimony as to the impossibility of the thing, there was of course no good in further argument. I therefore merely remarked that I was glad to have an erroneous impression dissipated in so conclusive a manner.

'Don't mention it,' he returned blandly; 'it might be useful to you, if it comes to that; for there's more human vanity and conceit runs in the direction of wolume-writing than in any other I know of; and you might be hankering after a try. Don't. Look at me. I'm a living monument of what comes of it. I wouldn't mention it to everybody, and so don't you,' he continued, when he had allowed himself fully a minute to regard the effect on me of his last astounding observation; 'but it is a fact. Praps you think that I was brought up to this line of business?'

I informed him, what was really the fact, that, since he had put it into my head to consider the matter at all, I had had grave doubts of it.

'You are right,' said he gratefully; 'it's a treat to meet with a man of penetration. No; I was not brought up to it. I was brought into it. It was that identical idea of making a wolume that did *my* business, and made me a coffee-stall keeper whether I liked it or no. I was in a good situation when the maggot bit me. I was always fond of reading, you must know. I read Dickens, and Ainsworth, and them kind of authors, till at last I got into my head that I could do it. It appeared to me that if I could only get my characters together, there'd be no more difficulty in

making up a book than a tailor finds in making a coat when he's got the cloth to commence with. I used to wander about of nights, puzzling and puzzling over it, and that's how I came to look in at coffee-stalls. One night it came to me all on a sudden—*this* is the kind of thing for you! Keep a coffee-stall! You won't need to go hunting after "characters" then; they will come to you, and you can contemplate and study 'em at your leisure.'

'A most ingenious idea,' I remarked, seeing that he wished me to say something at this juncture.

'That's what I thought. I was struck so of a heap by it, in a manner of speaking, that I set about working it out at once. I bought a coffee-stall business of a man up Paddington way for seven-pun'ten, the notion being to keep it going for a couple of months or so until I got the characters for my literary venture all in order, and then to sell the business again for what it would fetch, and go in for story-writing. And, Lord! you know,' he exclaimed, warming with the subject and speaking with increased energy, 'there is no doubt in the world that the idea was a good one, if one could only hit on the proper way to work it. It didn't turn out well for me, because I lost my situation at the cork-cutter's in consequence of not being able to keep my eyes open all day and all night as well, and so was thrown back entirely on the stall, having nothing else to depend on for a living. But there really ought to be something in it. You don't happen to know anything about the way of it, I suppose, sir?'

'How do you mean, the way of it?'

'Well, you see,' returned the coffee-stall keeper, stirring his

hair slowly with his fingers and looking out vaguely into the darkness of night, 'I shouldn't be surprised if double-entry was the secret of it.'

'In what respect?'

'Well, you hear of double-entry being brought to bear in book-keeping, and I shouldn't wonder if it was something of the same in book-writing. There seems to be—leastways, speaking for myself—a entry in a man's head for the ideas of a volume to get admission into; but the job is for them to find their way out again when they're called on to do so, if you can make that out.'

I was compelled to confess that I could not make it out exactly.

'What I mean is, that when a character comes before me I am able to spot him at once. Man or woman, it makes no difference. "You'll do for a character in the volume," I say to myself. Maybe it's a female; and, dear heart! you would be astonished at the number of the kind of that sex that drop in here in the middle of the night. Not of the kind you saw here a while ago—they're common as blackberries on the hedges, poor creatures! but well-bred and brought-up parties, mind you; dragged down to the lowest, but still with the nature of the lady, what was first planted in 'em plain enough to be discovered through all the artificial overlaying. They'll come here, sir, and behave in a way that makes a man shiver, and cause him to look in the paper next morning for an account of a suicide from the bridge. I assure you, sir, I've had more opportunities than I required of getting characters of that class for that there book of mine.'

'They make you acquainted with their miserable history sometimes, I suppose?'

'A kind word when they are regularly down and broken-hearted brings them out wonderfully, poor things. I've heard stories from their lips, sir, enough almost to make a man hate himself for being a man. But they are not the most curious sort I have to deal with occasionally,' he added, shaking his head gravely. 'When I think of the queer customers I have had to deal with since I kept a night coffee-stall, it seems that that book, if it ever comes out, should have a chapter or two in it about ghosts.'

'Why about ghosts?'

'Well, midnight spectres—unaccountable beings, both men and women, who seem to hide in a mysterious kind of way all day long, and to come out about midnight, to wander about with nothing to do but to pray for daylight—if they dare to pray at all—so that they may slink back to their vaults, or their churchyards, or wherever they live when they are at home.'

'But you must not forget that there are hundreds of persons who are compelled by their honest business to be abroad at unseemly hours.'

'That I'm aware of, sir,' replied the coffee-stall keeper, sinking his voice to a whisper, and peering out into the dark, as though he half suspected that one of the 'queer customers' he had alluded to might be lurking somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood; 'but the sort you speak of behave in a honest straightforward way. But what would you think, for instance, of a customer, if one can be called such who begs a cup of coffee, not having the money to pay for it, who confides to you in a secret kind of way that he wants to kill himself, and has tried, and that there is some invisible power that won't let him?'

'It would require some tolerably strong evidence to convince me that such a man was not an impostor or a madman,' I replied.

'Tolerably strong evidence!' he repeated, his eyes expanding and his face assuming a horrified expression at the mere remembrance; 'why, so I had it. It is a year and a half ago now, in the middle of summer time. A tall dark man he was, not old, though his hair was gray, and his face white as chalk. It was at the quietest time o' night—about two, say—and I was here by myself. He had been running, I think, for he could scarcely speak when he slipped in, waking me out of a doze. "Give me—I do not say sell me—give me a little something warm to drink, for humanity's sake!" he exclaimed, sinking down on to the form, and covering his face with his hands. Of course it wouldn't do to be free in giving to every one who asked, but in a business like mine there are some sort of people that you'd best be quickly rid of, though at a sacrifice. I looked on him as one of them, and handed him a cup of coffee, and as I did so I saw by the light of my lamp that he was reeking wet. His hair and face were smeared with gray mud, and the ends of his black neckerchief seemed stuck to his shirt-front with it, and at his feet where he sat there was a pool of water which still was trickling from his clothes. "Why, man alive!" said I—it's a common expression of mine—"man alive," said I, "you've been in the river!" He took his hands from his white face and gave me a look I shall never forget, as he answered bitterly, "Yes, man alive, thanks to the curse that is on me. Only that I am helpless it should have been man dead a week ago. You," said he, glaring at me, "would

think it hard to be doomed to die?" I'm not a nervous man, but I slipped the bread-knife out of his reach as I replied that I'd like a few years longer, if it didn't put any one to inconvenience. "Then pray to the Lord," he said, springing to his feet, "that you may never be condemned to a worse fate! Pray that you may never be doomed to live in spite of yourself, and want to die, and try to die, and find that Death will have nothing to do with you. Do I wish to live?" he cried, in a voice loud enough for the policeman at the corner of the road to have heard him; "look here, man!" and he tore open the front of his muddy shirt, and showed me on his bare breast a wound such as a stab with a knife might make, "does this show it? Ha, ha! why, I did not even bleed. Can a leap from the centre of London Bridge into the black river below end a poor wretch's life? I leapt, I did—I who never in my life swam a yard or knew how; I leapt sheer in the middle of the stream, and somehow—somehow," he repeated, in a tone that made me shiver, "I awoke to consciousness on the mud of the shore as full as before of hateful life—the hateful life to which I am chained and fettered!" And with that and not another word he took himself off as hurriedly as he had come in, leaving me so confused in mind that, only for his half-emptied cup and the pool of water on the ground, I might have persuaded myself that it was a dream.'

'A madman, no doubt,' I remarked, as he brought the strange narrative to a close.

'Mind you, I don't answer for the sanity of any of the night spectres we're speaking of,' continued the coffee-stall keeper, laying a detaining hand on my

arm, for I had made a move as for going; 'but I have had 'em not so mad but what they have become regular customers. For over three weeks—and what I'm going to tell you now happened not more than eight or nine months ago—I had a customer regularly every night, that was as good as seven shillings a week to me. A woman it was, a lady, not one of the unfortunate order, but real. Middle aged she was, as far as I could see through her thick black veil, and tall, with a dark cloak that covered her from her throat to her shoes. It was snowy weather and bitter cold when I first set eyes on her—there were customers in at the time—walking rapidly past and looking in each time. At last, when they had all cleared out, she came in herself, and asked for some bread and some tea, which she ate and drank as famished like as though she had had no food all day, but without raising her veil. "Have you the day's newspaper?" she asked. "No, ma'am; we don't have any call for newspapers in my line." "Can you get me the one that is published to-morrow, that I may see it to-morrow night?" "If you'll leave the money I will, ma'am." So she said no more, but with a hand such as only a born and bred lady can have, white as paper, and lovely and taper, she took a half-crown from her purse and away she went. Well, on the next night she came—I was on the look-out for her—walking to and fro until I was here by myself, and again she had bread and tea, eating it ravenous, as on the first occasion. I'd got the *Times* all ready for her. She took it eager enough, but she didn't keep it two minutes. The column she turned to was the police-news column, and she just glanced over

that, and then put the paper down in a way that told me she had not found what she wanted. "I'll come again to-morrow night," she said, "and get me the newspaper again, please;" and down she puts another half-crown, and goes off in a hurry.

'Well, sir, believe me she kept on that game for one-and-twenty nights, excepting Sundays, when there was no police-news to read, always coming in the same way, and dressed in the cloak and the black veil; always biding her time until she could have the stall to herself for a few minutes; always ordering bread and tea, and invariably taking it ravenous. At last one night she came—past one o'clock it was—and ate and drank and looked at the paper, but this time with a difference; for no sooner did she clap eyes on the police intelligence than, uttering a cry and with her white hands shaking, she tore the page out, and crushing it up in her hands darted off with it.'

'Well?' said I, finding that he did not go on.

'That was the last of her, sir. Whoever she was and what her mysterious business might have been, she never came after that. I felt so curious about it, that I got a *Times* next morning and looked over the police news, but there was nothing there to account for her queer behaviour. I recollect what the cases were. There was one for forgery, one for riding in a second-class carriage with a third-class ticket, two cases of pocket-picking, and a case of a undertaker on whose premises was found a young baby in a coffin, and there seemed a bit of a mud-dle how he had come by it. And it didn't seem likely that she could have had any concern with anything there.'

I did not venture an opinion,

but it struck me as not impossible that my coffee-vending friend had not sufficiently considered the last item of the list he had quoted.

'Why, there's dozens of these unaccountable customers I could call to mind if it was worth while,' he continued, after a short pause. 'Just about the end of last year there used to drop in here every Friday night, as regularly as clockwork between twelve and one, an old woman—precious old to be sure she seemed—with an old-fashioned coalscuttle bonnet and a crutched stick just like that Mother Shipton has in the picture of her. I never saw a more ugly old woman, and she looked all the uglier from always coming in company with as sweet a little creature of a child, a girl of five or six years old say, as ever you set eyes on; a delicate blue-eyed little thing, with hair like yellow-floss silk, nearly all tucked away into the dark-cloth hood she wore, and with a complexion that, compared with the old woman's, was the whitest marble against Spanish mahogany. She didn't seem unkind to the child, but let it eat and drink what it wished for; but the old woman herself never on any occasion ate or drank a morsel, though on every occasion of her Friday night's visit she seemed and the child too as though they had tramped a very long way, being wet with the rain or dusty with the dust, as the weather might be. There was no fear of them taking cold, however, for they were both, and especially the little girl, well shod and as warmly clad as need be. But the puzzle to me was what two such strange companions wanted out of a night together. At last—that was after they had paid me ten or a dozen visits—there came in a man while they were there, and as

soon as he saw the old woman he looked towards me and winked in a way I didn't understand. The old woman must have seen him wink, for all in a moment she took the little girl by the hand, and hobbled off with her as quick as her legs would move her bent old body. "You know who that is?" the man asked me. "No, I don't," said I. "Well," says he, "that's old Mother Mutch of Stepney. She's sold herself to the devil; but the bargain was, that when the old un wanted her he was to fetch her out of her bed at midnight, and that time to be put off as long as she could get a child who had not yet shed its milk-teeth to be her companion. She could roll in money if she liked; and she is under a promise to leave it all to that little girl when her time comes. It is to stave off that time that she never sleeps in her bed of nights, but wanders about London from dark till daylight with the little child with her." Now what do you think of that?" asked the coffee-stall keeper.

'What did Mother Mutch say the next time she came?' I asked.

'She never came after that time when she saw the man wink, which I think looks black against her. At all events I've got her down as a witch in the characters I'm trying to get together for the wolume, and chance it. But the very oddest experience I ever did have since I have kept a stall of nights was—'

But at that moment a cabman drove up with two tipsy gentlemen who required refreshment, and I made the occasion an excuse for bidding good-bye to the man of midnight spectres, at the same time wishing him luck in his literary enterprise should he ever launch it.

TWELVE O'CLOCK, NOON.

It is almost useless to tell you the story, because I know you will not believe it. I have not alluded to the circumstances for the last twenty years, and I quite intended never to speak of them again; but our conversation has taken such an extraordinary turn that I will tell you the story exactly as the event happened to me; and my only stipulation is that when you have heard it, you will make no comment. I don't ask you to believe it, because I know that ninety-nine people out of a hundred never would; but whatever you may think, I will tell you truly and conscientiously what occurred.

It is more easy to say that a period of twenty years has elapsed in a novel than it is to recall the same period to the memory in real life. However, twenty years ago I was a very young man. Like most young men, I was hard up. I had just passed my final examination, and had been duly dubbed a lawyer and made a gentleman by Act of Parliament. One day, as I was anxiously reading the pages of the *Law Times*, looking out for something to do, I came across an advertisement, setting forth in glowing language the fact that, in a country market-town, within about thirty miles from London, there was a small lawyer's practice (capable of great extension by an energetic young man, the advertisement averred) which was to be sold for a mere trifle. In those days I had greater confidence in my own abilities than I have at present, and the perusal of this 'legal fiction' (for I can

call it nothing else) fired my young imagination. I saw myself installed in a cheerful and business-like office, overlooking a quaint old-fashioned street, and shaded by tall trees growing at the back of the house. I imagined myself as the registrar of the County Court, and the receptacle of the family secrets of all the farmers for miles round. I said to myself that I was not ambitious, that I cared little for the worry and anxiety of the busy town. A quiet useful country life, the esteemed friend of the rector, and the husband of a loving wife—these were my desires, and they all seemed to me to be included within the six-line paragraph in the newspaper.

To hesitate was to lose the chance of a lifetime. 'There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune,' I remarked. Therefore I at once wrote to the address indicated in the advertisement. After a considerable amount of correspondence, I became the purchaser of the practice; and after paying for it, found myself with five pounds' hard cash, and thousands of pounds in imagination. I decided that it would be unwise to allow the grass to grow under my feet; and so, without losing any time, I packed up all my earthly treasures (which I found would easily go within the compass of my portmanteau), and started from the London terminus for my destination.

In about half an hour I arrived at a pretty-looking country station, where I alighted, and, taking ad-

vantage of a ruin of a 'bus which was drawn by a wheezy and low-spirited horse, I soon found myself in the middle of the town of H——. I immediately went to the lodgings I had previously secured; and after being delighted with their cleanliness and neatness, I sallied forth to inspect my office. In a few minutes I arrived at the place, and was ushered into my premises by a very young and light-haired clerk, who kindly gave up his pastime of aliding down the banisters, in order to show me over the offices. Here, too, everything looked clean and business-like, and the number of bundles and papers ostentatiously displayed all over the office filled me with bright pictures of the future. Having completed my survey, I went to see the town. Here, at least, my visions were fulfilled. The long straggling street planted with trees, and terminating in a large square filled with farmers' and agricultural implements, was almost exactly what I had imagined in my daydreams. Turning down a quiet and narrow side-street, I found myself in front of a splendid church, round which clustered old-fashioned cottages and houses. The town was everywhere interspersed with trees, and the whole place, lighted up as it was by the warm glow of the setting sun, looked simply charming.

The next day was Sunday, so I went to church. The interior was no doubt quite equal to the exterior, which had impressed me so much on the previous evening; but I did not notice it. The singing of the surpliced choir was, I daresay, excellent; but I did not join in it (although my voice was an excellent tenor at that time). The sermon was, I have little doubt, an excessively telling and practical one, but I

did not listen to it; for, to tell you the truth, a great change had come over me since I arrived at H——. I had fallen in love. *She* was sitting opposite to me, dressed entirely in black. I cannot describe her to you, and I would not if I could, because whatever impression my words might convey to you, it would fall so short of the picture in my mind that I should hate myself for having slandered her to you. I don't mean to say, as they do in novels, that she was gloriously beautiful, or anything of that sort; but what I mean is that her sweet pale face and the graceful outline of her figure so impressed me, and called up all the good feelings in my nature, that, without waiting to inquire what the deep crape she wore meant, or whether her affections were in any way previously occupied, without the slightest hesitation, I gave her all my love. Ah, it's a long time ago! (Have another glass of port, old man; the nights draw in now, and it's getting chilly.)

Sitting at my dinner and thinking over the events of the morning, I came to the conclusion that it was the duty of every man, and especially of a country lawyer, to support the Church, 'as by law established;' and accordingly, contrary to my usual custom, I again went to church in the evening. She was there. I forget the text. After service, as I had nothing particular to do, I—well, I don't know that it is worth while to beat about the bush for an expression—I followed her home. She knocked at a large and handsome house; and after she had been admitted by a manservant, I casually walked past the door in an unconcerned manner, and noticed 'Dr. Stanton' engraved on the plate. Then I

turned in for the night; and the following day I settled down to work: but I grieve to say that the matter uppermost in my mind was how to obtain an introduction to Dr. Stanton. At length I accomplished this. I forget exactly how it was done; but it is easy enough, as you know, in a country town. The doctor was a very agreeable man, and had a large practice; and after a week or so of nodding and chatting about the weather, the crops, and the ministry, he asked me to dinner. I do not wish to make a love-story of this, because my object in telling it is to prove to you that 'there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy,' and not to expose to you my own foolishness.

Well, I went to dine with the doctor, and was duly introduced to his niece, Clara Stanton. She was still in black, and appeared low-spirited; but she received me very kindly, and during the course of the evening we had a pleasant chat together. She was well read, not at all bashful, and fortunately, as I happened to have just finished reading a book in which she was particularly interested, we began talking at once. Miss Stanton, I could see, was interested in the conversation, and brightened up considerably, so that on my leaving she expressed a wish that I would lend her the book we had been chatting about, which, as you may imagine, I was only too happy to do, especially as it made such a good excuse for calling again. The doctor was to all appearance very pleased, and hoped he would see me there often. I said I hoped he would.

As time went on, I discovered that Miss Stanton was an orphan, and had very little money of her own. The doctor was her guar-

dian, and appeared excessively fond of her. I was a constant visitor at the house, and my love increased more and more each day. Clara always appeared pleased to see me, and by a thousand little ways showed an especial interest in me. I was young then, and took all these 'signs of the times' in a straightforward way, and thought that, even if she did not love me then, she was drifting that way. And so a year passed by. I was happy in my love, and I was young; and the love and the happiness were quite sufficient to counterbalance the anxiety that I suffered in another direction.

That business was a delusion and a snare. I was an energetic young man, but I did not extend the practice. Not that it was my fault; I should have extended the practice if there had been a practice to extend, but unfortunately there wasn't. The light-haired youth, who, I subsequently discovered, possessed the quality of lightness in his head and fingers as well as in his hair, gave me a most impressive and solemn warning at the end of a week, and left me alone in my glory a month after my arrival. The papers turned out on examination to be as deceptive as the youth. I grieve to expose the hollowness of mankind, but those papers were simply and emphatically dummies. Like conjuring tricks when you once knew them, 'there was nothing in them.' And consequently my visions (as most pleasant visions do) faded away, and at the end of twelve months I found myself minus money, plus love.

I determined to put an end to this unsatisfactory state of affairs one way or the other. Therefore one evening when I was alone with Clara I told her how I loved her. I know you can understand that it is painful even yet to recall

these circumstances, and so I shall tell you nothing but what is absolutely necessary to my story. Miss Stanton seemed almost bewildered when first it dawned upon her that I wished her to be my wife; then, when she fully understood my meaning, in a kind and yet firm manner she declined my proposals, adding that I had been a good friend to her ever since we were first acquainted, and she regretted that I had misconstrued actions, which she had intended merely as tokens of good-will, into hopes that she could ever regard me with any warmer feelings than those of a friend. She told me (and I can remember to this day how her beauty and grief affected me) that she had for some years been engaged to be married to a young officer in the navy, but that he had recently been drowned during a heavy storm which his ship had encountered. She explained to me that he was the person for whom she always wore mourning, and in broken accents told me how she could never love another. After this I could of course say nothing further to her; and upon apologising for my want of thought in not first ascertaining how it was she always appeared in black, I left her with feelings which, thank Heaven, one does not often experience.

Miss Stanton's refusal of my offer, coupled with the extremely discouraging nature of my business, induced me to make up my mind to leave H—— without any delay. The business was not worth anything, and so I had no trouble on my mind as regards disposing of it.

One morning, a few days after the event I have just related, I was settling up a few odd things in the office previous to my departure, when Dr. Stanton was announced. He entered, and seeing

the nature of my preparations, he said,

'Why, you don't mean to say you are going to leave us?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'I am. The law is all very well, but if you don't have any of the profits to counterbalance its proverbial delay, you fare rather badly. I've given this place a fair trial for twelve months. I don't particularly care about the business. I have gained a good experience by the affair, and at twenty-four one need not be downhearted. I don't mind about the business.'

'Then what do you mind about?' inquired the doctor; 'for it is easy to see by your manner that there is something the matter with you.'

I could not deny it; and as I felt horribly downhearted and troubled, I made a clean breast and told the doctor all about it.

He started and, I thought, turned a little pale at my story; but quickly recovering himself, he answered in a kindly manner, 'I am very sorry; I wish you had consulted me first. But, however, least said on such a subject as this is soonest mended. I shall not persuade you to stay in the town after what has occurred; but for all that, you can undertake for me the business on which I have called. I have often regretted that I have hitherto been unable to help you in your business; but at length I can put something in your way, by which you can easily make a hundred or so.'

'It's like my luck,' I answered. 'If this had only come a month ago! However, I will do all I can to help you, doctor, and thank you over and over again for all your kindness to me.'

We shook hands sympathetically, and then the doctor told me his business. He said that a friend of his had lately died, leaving a large property, which had descend-

ed to him, he being the only male representative of the family surviving. But he explained to me that there were several distant relations, who were far from being well off; and as the property had come to him unexpectedly, he had decided to sell it all, and then divide the proceeds between the poorer relations, of course taking a fair share himself.

I complimented him on his generosity, but he cut me short by saying,

'The place is situated near to C—, which, as you know, is more than two hundred miles from here. What I want you to do is to go at once to C— and make all arrangements about the sale of the property, and particularly to get a valuer to go over it with you. You shall have the deeds on your return to get the legal part of the affair ready.'

Then giving me the names of some first-class auctioneers in C—, Dr. Stanton departed.

Glad to do anything which might divert my thoughts from the painful subject upon which they were concentrated, I at once started for C—. It was late at night when I arrived there; and as nothing could be done then, I immediately went to bed. Next morning I called upon the auctioneers and explained my business. They could not go with me then to survey the property, but we made an arrangement for the ensuing day; and as I did not know a soul in the place and had nothing to do, I said, if they would direct me to the house, I would go and look over it. They gave me the keys, which were in their possession; and after a pleasant four miles' drive I reached my destination. There I drew up at a substantially-built lodge. The gate was opened by an old man, who informed me, in an-

swer to my inquiry, that there was no one in the house. I drove up a long winding carriage-drive, and at length pulled up in front of a large square old-fashioned-looking mansion situated in what I may almost call a dell, inasmuch as the garden and park rose up on all sides round the house and were thickly wooded with shrubs. The whole looked deserted and forlorn, and the bright hot mid-summer sun, which shone with great power and heat, seemed rather to add to the loneliness than otherwise.

I placed the key in the door and with some difficulty turned it. The door swung back on its hinges with a harsh grating sound, and involuntarily I felt a horrible feeling of loneliness come over me. Almost instinctively I turned round; nothing met my eyes but the quiet country bathed in the sunshine, and then, laughing at myself for my cowardice, I entered the house and closed the door after me. It was completely furnished; but all the furniture and chandeliers were covered, and the carpets were rolled up in a corner. I wandered on from the hall to the dining-room, then into the drawing-room, my footsteps echoing through the whole building. I was making memoranda in my pocket-book of things I wanted to ask the auctioneer. I can remember the whole scene as though it was only yesterday, and I swear that I had my senses fully about me. I looked at my watch and found it was half-past twelve; then I went up the lonely stairs and stood on the landing. Opposite to me was a long corridor of bedroom-doors, at the end of which another passage crossed it at right angles. There was little light in the passage I was looking down; but the other passage was lighted by some win-

downs which were out of sight, so that the end of the passage in which I was standing was brightly illuminated.

No sooner had I ascended the stairs and noticed the particulars I have before mentioned, when suddenly I felt an involuntary repetition of the feeling I had experienced at the door, and by some horrible fascination my attention was fastened on the light at the end of the passage. Now is your time to laugh if you like, but I don't feel like laughing, although it all happened twenty years ago; but as I was standing in that passage, by Heaven, I saw Clara Stanton come out of one of the bedrooms and walk down the passage! I felt my heart give one great leap into my mouth, and then it seemed to stop beating. My blood rushed all through me with a hot flush, and then I was cold as stone. I grasped the banisters for support and looked again. There was no mistaking it. Clara Stanton was walking slowly down the dark passage. Presently she emerged into the light part at the end, and turned her face towards me. I have told you that she always looked sad; but the utter misery and wretchedness on her face at that moment, I shall never forget. Slowly she passed across the end of the passage, and then the wall hid her and she was gone.

Soon my senses returned to me, and shouting 'Clara, Clara!' I ran to the bedroom-door from which I had seen her come. I had expected to find it open; but it was locked, although I *know* I had seen her come through it. Again the supernatural dread caught hold of me, and without a moment's thought I ran out of the house. It was hours before I

recovered my equanimity, and even then nothing would have again persuaded me to have anything to do with that lonely house, and so by the next train I returned to H—.

The following day I sent a note over to Dr. Stanton, and asked him to call at my office; but the messenger returned with a reply to the effect that the doctor was unable to come. Miss Stanton had died suddenly on the previous day. My feelings had been so wrought upon, that I can hardly say the news surprised me, although you may imagine my sorrow. I immediately hastened to the doctor, and found the good man in the greatest trouble. I told him what had happened to me, and he turned as white as a sheet.

For some moments he could hardly speak. At length he managed to ask me if I recollected the time when I had seen Miss Stanton. I told him half-past twelve at noon.

'That was exactly the time she died,' he answered.

Then he told me her story. The property which had descended to the doctor belonged to the young naval officer she had loved. They had known each other from childhood, and were fondly devoted. When the young man came of age they were formally engaged, and there had been great rejoicings at C— amongst the tenantry. Clara had taken part in them. It had been arranged that her lover should go for one more voyage before they were married, and that voyage was his last; for he had been drowned, as I have before told you, and Clara had been heart-broken ever since. The doctor knew she was ill, but he had no idea how dangerously. The day she had died, and on

which I saw her spirit, was the anniversary of the day on which she had heard of her lover's death.

There is nothing more to tell. The doctor sold the property, but I had nothing to do with it.

What it was I saw, I don't know; why I saw it, I don't know; but never you assert again, old man, that it is impossible for a ghost to appear by daylight. I know it is possible, because I've seen one.

LONDON SOCIETY.

The Christmas Number for 1877.



A COACHFUL OF GHOSTS:

The Story of a Noble House

IN

THE REIGN OF TERROR.

CHAPTER I.

'MONSIEUR LE VICOMTE DE MAURY.'
This announcement, made one evening in January 1792, at the outer drawing-room door of the
CHRISTMAS, '77.

Château de Grou, had rather a singular effect on six well-bred people who were sitting there.

The old Marquise, enthroned in a high armchair beside the yawning chimney with its wood-fire,

made an exclamation, and threw a half-fierce, half-laughing glance at her son the Marquis, who started up from the table where he was playing backgammon with his wife's cousin, the Chevalier de Mazan. The younger Marquise, a thin precise-looking woman of five-and-forty, pinched her mouth up into its most forbidding expression, and raised her eyes with a frown from the tapestry-frame over which she and her daughter-in-law, the Comtesse de Grou, were bending and blinding themselves. The Comte, seeing his father's hasty movement, got up too from his chair in the background, and came forward one or two steps with a dignified slowness which was in itself a reproach to his perturbed relations.

There was no time to say or do anything. The visitor, welcome or not, walked forward into the room and met these six pair of eyes, curious, angry, contemptuous, cold, astonished, haughty. Not one friendly look, not one sign of welcome. The visitor's cheeks, already ruddy from the cold air outside, took a deeper shade as he exchanged formal bows with the inmates of this inhospitable salon. His appearance at least did not deserve such a reception. A handsome, spirited-looking young man, a head and shoulders taller than the other gentlemen present, with one of those expressive faces that give unprejudiced people an instant feeling of liking and confidence. At the Château de Grou, however, M. de Maury was regarded as an enemy, for several reasons, and it was not without hesitation that the old Marquise brought herself to treat him as an equal, and politely motioned him to a chair.

'Sit down, monsieur, I beg of you,' said she. 'You are out late this evening, but perhaps it is the

fashion. It is long since I lived in Paris, and I do not know what they do there now.'

'Pardon me, madame, for appearing at such a strange hour,' said M. de Maury. 'But, as you may imagine, it is only an affair of the greatest importance that has brought me here at all.'

'Indeed! And to what do we owe this unusual honour?' said the Marquise blandly.

'Madame, it is—it may be—a matter of life and death.'

'Is it possible? Before we come to anything so serious, may one ask for the last news from Paris? I should not care to leave the world in a state of ignorance. What are your good friends the patriots doing now, monsieur?'

'There is no special news this week, madame. It is still disturbed, of course, but the people will calm down in time. If the Constitution we have made is allowed to work, we shall have peace and prosperity, in which all our past confusion will be forgotten.'

'Then, monsieur, we shall all have to pray for bad memories,' said the Chevalier.

'What is your saint, your hero, doing? M. de Lafayette—what do you call him—Motier?' said the Marquis, laughing. 'By the bye, let me apologise for my ill-trained servants, who gave you your title at the door. The fact is, monsieur, I forget who you are. Citoyen—'

'Bernard Lavigne,' said the young man, smiling a little. 'One must be willing to sacrifice empty distinctions at the wish of the nation. But, monsieur—let me ask you—was anything great and sublime ever done without a touch of absurdity in the doing it?'

'Perhaps not; but one wants the sublimity to excuse the absurdity,' said the Marquis. 'And to

‘speak candidly, I have seen absurdities enough, and horrors enough, in these last two years; but my very strongest spectacles have not availed to detect the sublimity.’

‘There is something sublime on the tapis now, however,’ said the old Marquise. ‘A matter of life and death. Will Monsieur de Maury break it to us before he enters on the subject of Monsieur de Lafayette?’

‘Madame,’ began Bernard, with a little hesitation.

His eyes wandered once or twice round the room, as if to reassure themselves of something.

‘Do not disturb yourself,’ said Madame de Grou. ‘All our hearts are strong enough to bear bad news. At least, I can promise that you will see no weakness.’

The Vicomte bowed

‘A report has reached us, madame,’ he said, ‘that you are thinking of emigration. It has spread itself in the town and in the neighbouring villages. People say that you mean to drive away in state in your large coach with all your household, without any attempt at concealment. Mesdames et mes-sieurs,’ he went on, rising from his chair, and looking earnestly round on all the dimly-lit faces, ‘believe what I say, and do not distrust me. In the present state of people’s minds, you cannot attempt anything more dangerous. Your carriage will not be allowed to pass. Seeking liberty, you will find yourselves in prison. I warn you honestly, and as a friend.’

There was a moment’s pause after the young man had spoken.

‘And, as a friend, what would you advise us to do?’ said the Marquis.

‘Ah, cher monsieur, thank you a thousand times! Will you indeed trust me, and take my advice? Then let me implore you to stay here, and not to think of emi-

gration. You are comparatively safe here. There are still some who respect you. And my father’s influence will do a great deal for your protection. Ah, let me hear that you have given up all thoughts of this mad and dangerous scheme.’

The Chevalier glanced at the Comte and laughed a little sneeringly, as he leaned over the backgammon board. The Marquis smiled too.

‘And this is your new French liberty!’ he said. ‘A man cannot drive away from his house in his own carriage without being stopped and imprisoned. Curious, truly!’

‘One has not far to seek for an explanation in this case, my dear Marquis,’ said the Chevalier de Mazan, nodding his head with a side glance at M. de Maury. ‘In fact, you may take it as a general rule that, where the people rise unexpectedly, they are egged on to it by some person superior in birth to themselves—some person with a motive. But such persons are too apt to spoil their own game by a lurking wish to stand well with all parties.’

Monsieur de Mazan was generally considered the genius, the wit, and the wise man of the family. Everybody hung upon his words, smiled, and looked to see how they were taken by the object of them.

‘I am glad to think,’ said Bernard, ‘that Monsieur de Grou does not share in the vile suspicions of monsieur his cousin. He has known me too long—’

‘And have I had any reason to increase my esteem with my knowledge?’ said the Marquis, with a little bow.

The young man was about to answer, when an appearance at the door which separated the salon from another room beyond checked the words upon his lips.

A girl, dressed in white, very

slim and graceful, with a small fair face and large frightened blue eyes, stood still in the tapestry-framed doorway, and gazed at him. His low bow seemed to bring her back to herself. She answered it with a sweeping courtesy, and glided round with light steps on the polished floor, behind the two younger Mesdames de Grou and their frame, to a corner behind the old Marquise's chair.

'Have you brought me my fan, Léonore?' said the old woman.

'Here it is, madame,' said the girl, in a low voice, putting it into her hand.

But while she spoke and moved she never took her eyes away from the Vicomte de Maury, who stood opposite to her with his face to the whole circle. Her entrance seemed to silence them all for a moment. The Chevalier still smiled, with a snake-like contentment, keeping his black eyes fixed on Bernard; but the Marquis looked a little disturbed, and his face twitched angrily.

The young Comtesse de Grou, a weak, impatient-looking little person, glanced up at her husband, who was standing near her, with an expression which said, 'Finish this scene, for pity's sake!' And the Comte, stepping forward with a Louis-Quatorze air, ventured to ask M. de Maury whether they might expect any further information.

'I have warned your family of their danger, monsieur,' replied Bernard quietly, 'and I still hope, not without avail. I must endure your suspicions, which I might have expected. I am happy to know that there is one person, at least, who will not share in them.'

'Never, never!' came a quick half-whisper from behind the Marquise's chair.

Bernard bowed gratefully.

'Allons, this is too much' said

the Chevalier, in a low tone, to M. de Grou. 'Will you complete this business, or must I?'

But the old Marquise was doing it for them.

'Adieu, then, monsieur,' she said, rising. 'We beg to offer you our thanks. If your warning is founded on fact, we probably shall never meet again. I would only ask you to use your influence and that of monsieur votre père to make our stay in prison as short as possible.'

M. de Maury bowed low, and walked out of the room. The Marquis waved his son back, and followed him himself.

'Listen to me a moment, mon cher,' he said, drawing him aside in the ante-room. 'I believe myself that you are honest in your way. But you see you are in bad odour with De Mazan and the ladies. He is jealous of you, and they are all on his side.'

'Pardon, monsieur—not *all*, or where would be his jealousy?'

'Ah! I did not count the demoiselle herself. But listen: I will give you a chance, on my own responsibility. Emigrate with us. Trust yourself to that same dangerous coach. When we are safe over the frontier, you can quarrel with De Mazan—shoot him, if you like—and then you have your chance.'

'You are very good, monsieur, but my lot is cast in with France. As to that coach—if you would but believe the danger!—ah, let me at least save mademoiselle your niece.'

'It is impossible,' said the Marquis, turning away. 'I have given my word to De Mazan. I cannot break it if I would.'

'What horror, what barbarity! To sacrifice such a life—'

'Let us say no more. Some one is coming. I thank you for your good intentions. Adieu, adieu!'

The Marquis de Grou tripped back into the salon, looking quite old and grave, and the Vicomte de Maury left the château.

CHAPTER II.

Mdlle. LÉONORE DE GROU D'ISAMBERT was an important person in her family. Her father had married—an unusual step for a younger son, and, what was more extraordinary still, had made a love-match with—the heiress of the Isamberts, thus possessing himself of a fine château and a large estate, and becoming quite independent of his own people. But he did not long enjoy his good fortune. He and his wife both died young, and their one child was taken charge of by her grandmother, the old Marquise de Grou.

Léonore was a quiet timid girl, and her submission to the stately, severe, domineering old lady was unusually complete and unquestioning, even for that country and that time. She was to marry M. de Mazan, a cold-hearted man of the world, more than twenty years older than herself. Clever, well-bred, aristocratic, an altogether delightful person, said the De Grou chorus whenever he was mentioned. Only the little Marquis sometimes held his peace; there were one or two points on which he differed with his wife's brilliant cousin. Nothing that signified, of course; only slight doubts whether it was really possible to be cruel, grasping, ungenerous, and yet hold the front rank among gentlemen.

No regular contract had yet been made between M. de Mazan and Mdlle. d'Isambert, but everyone understood that the match was to be, and approved of it. Those fine estates could not be in better hands than the Chevalier's. His

connection with the family was also an advantage. Léonore was already eighteen, and the marriage might have taken place before this, had it not been for the great disturbances in France, which had a restraining effect on the Chevalier's eagerness.

Her château was near Paris, in the thick of the Revolution; and he thought it might be as well to wait for quieter times, and not to hamper himself just now with a young unwilling bride. Her family would take care that she did not escape him.

And this emigration scheme would take her away from the influence of young Bernard de Maury. His father, the Comte de Maury, the De Grou's nearest neighbour, had never been very friendly with them, having a way of considering his humanity before his nobility, quite against all their traditions. But till within the last year or two Bernard had been a frequent guest at the Château de Grou; the Marquis liked him, and an old childish friendship between him and Léonore had advanced into something not the less sweet because it was hopeless, and because in its language there were few spoken words.

Even now Bernard was not without his allies in the château, though perhaps they were not very powerful ones. There was an old woman, Pernette Flicquet by name, who had been nurse to Mdlle. d'Isambert, Léonore's mother, and to Léonore herself. It was in her charge that Léonore had come from Isambert to Grou, after her mother's death.

Pernette's daughter Jeanneton had also come in the suite of the little demoiselle, and not long after had received permission from the Marquis to marry Luc Bienbon, a garde-chasse of M. de Maury's. Pernette had at once established

herself in antagonism to the old Marquise, who often threatened to turn her off, but always ended by granting a contemptuous forgiveness, knowing that the sharp, plainspoken, republican old woman was almost indispensable to Léonore.

'Allez !' said Madame de Grou, 'Pernette talks all the nonsense you can imagine, but she is good at heart. Who cares for her and her tongue? Let her stay.'

If Pernette and her daughter could have poisoned M. de Mazan, and given their young lady to Bernard de Maury, they would have been troubled with few scruples. But the great Grou household was too much for them, and till now they had only grumbled.

The preparations for driving off in the family coach went on quite openly. The ladies superintended the packing of their wardrobes, and Pernette, with sour acquiescence, received the Marquise's order to get ready Mdlle. d'Isambert's best gowns and jewelry.

'Hé !' said Pernette, 'a fine present for the nation ! Madame is determined it shall have everything. Now if I had my will, we should bury a few chests in the courtyard.'

'For you to dig up when we are gone, my good Pernette?' said Madame de Grou.

'As madame pleases. But where mademoiselle goes, certainly I go,' answered Pernette coolly.

'What ! You mean to venture yourself in this dangerous coach ? Seriously, have you heard any of these reports—that we shall drive ourselves straight to the guillotine ? Or is it all in Monsieur le Vicomte de Maury's imagination ?'

At that moment Pernette's heart was softened towards the old lady, who seemed to appeal to her as a friend, looking at her with

eyes full of human anxiety, but not a touch of fear.

'Madame la Marquise knows what those dogs of villagers are,' said she. 'I have only heard from my daughter what her husband says—that it is a great danger. M. le Vicomte has more sense than most of these gentlemen. He knows what he is talking about.'

'But we do not trust him,' said the Marquise, shaking her head. 'He and his father are false and dishonourable. Go, Pernette, do as I tell you, and send mademoiselle to me.'

'Ah, these poor nobles !' said Pernette, as she trotted off to do her duty. 'I have but half a heart for the patriots. But if we can save the sweetest of them all, the others must go their own way.'

Certainly the household had no lack of warnings. During the next day or two, the dogs of the château howled almost unceasingly; the Grou ghost, a white flying figure, who used sometimes to sweep with a rustle of wings and garments over the head of any one who found himself benighted outside the walls, was suddenly endowed with a voice, and screamed and sobbed at night round the towers, like an Irish Banshee : so the story goes.

Mdlle. d'Isambert had a strange and rather terrible dream, which she told to Pernette, and also to her grandmother. They both laughed; but the dream left its impression, and had its consequence.

'Madame,' said Léonore to the Marquise, 'I dreamed that the large coach with the six brown horses was drawn up yonder, under our windows, on the green beyond the moat.'

'And why not at the door ?' said Madame de Grou.

'Indeed I do not know. It stood there, and you were all get-

ting in. *I saw you, one by one, as I looked out of my window—you, my aunt, my uncle, my cousins, and Monsieur le Chevalier.*

'And not yourself? That was droll enough.'

'I was in my room—the door was locked and the window was barred, so that I could not get out. Ah, how terrified I was! I called to you, but you did not hear. I ran up and down the room; I shook the door; I tried to squeeze myself through the bars of the window. I thought I was left alone in the château—you had all forgotten me. The coach moved off round the grass—it was night, you know, and there were lanterns burning, and I saw frost sparkling on the ground. Then I tried again, and pushed myself through the bars, and clambered down the wall through the ivy—I do not know how. Then I ran through the cold wet grass, and overtook the coach just as it turned to go down the hill. I sprang to the door and held on with both hands, and cried out to you to take me in. Ah, now comes the frightful part of the dream! The people in the coach—they were not you—it was full of GHOSTS—*strange luminous forms, through which I saw their skeletons.* Heavens! what a terrible sight! I fell backwards into the grass; and then I awoke.'

For once Léonore forgot her awe of her grandmother, crouched down by her side, and hid her face against her stiff satin gown. Madame de Grou looked down at her with a smile of mixed affection and contempt.

'A wonderful dream, truly!' said she. 'But it has not been the custom of our family to dream terrors, any more than to feel them. However, my dear Léonore, console yourself. Your safety is very important; and when we emigrate, you certainly will not be for-

gotten or left behind. Foolish girl, have a little more courage, and learn to laugh at your dreams. Stand up: there is some one coming.'

'Shall you tell the others, madame?' asked Léonore, rising to her feet.

'I certainly shall not repeat such absurdities,' answered Madame de Grou. 'And if you must have your terrors, pray keep them to yourself.'

The young Comtesse came tripping into the room, to ask some question of her grandmother; and Léonore, who was not fond of her cousin, withdrew into a window, and looked out across the wintry landscape. The château stood high perched on a hill, with woods behind, and a broad slope of parkland, crossed by avenues, dividing it from the little town of Grou, which crept and established itself up the sides of the valley. Behind the long blue ridge opposite was the village of Maury and its château, smaller and less important than Grou, but held for many centuries by a race without any stain upon their name, foremost always in the wars and councils of the province. But now they were traitors to their order; and if a lady of Grou let her eyes wander across the faint smoke and dark roofs in the valley to those heights beyond, which always caught the last western sun, it would have been an insult to suppose that her well-trained thoughts could stray as far as the Château de Maury.

CHAPTER III.

It had never been the custom of the lords of Grou to shut their gates against anybody; they were far too proud to be suspicious.

Thus there were peasants going in and out of the courtyard at all hours, and thus Luc and Jeanneton were able to pay as many visits as they pleased to their good mother Pernette.

On one of those days of suspense, before any attempt was made to carry out the emigration plan, at about five in the evening, Léonore was sitting in the window of her own room. She had escaped from the salon half an hour before, and had been trying to strengthen and console herself by reading the *Imitation*, but now the fast-fading light obliged her to lay the book down. Her long white fingers were folded over its brown cover, and her face was turned towards the window.

The sky was very clear, but the landscape was already shrouded in twilight: nothing was plainly to be seen but the ridge of distant hills, which could only bring sad thoughts to her mind. In the pale, unconscious, immovable face there was a desolate resignation; at eighteen Léonore had nothing to hope for: her fate was fixed; even a wish was wrong and forbidden.

She would hardly have confessed what it was that she wanted; after all, her life was like the lives of all other French young ladies. And if it was not arranged quite to please her, why, was it not right to give up one's own will? was this world ever a happy place? Certain high precepts of the book she had been reading were in her mind as she sat, and made her ashamed of her discontent, but a little more despairing too: how could she ever reach such heights of willing self-denial?

'My pretty one will be perished, sitting here,' said the voice of old Pernette. 'And she will lose all her senses if she dreams too much over that book of madame's.'

'It is a very beautiful good

book, Pernette,' said Léonore, slowly rousing herself, and turning her blue eyes from the window to her old nurse's anxious withered face.

'That may be,' said Pernette. 'I can't read, as mademoiselle knows, and I am quite contented. I never saw anything but sighs and frowns come from reading those books. Madame la Marquise is always in a demon of a temper after she has done her reading. Mademoiselle has the temper of an angel, on the contrary, but she will make herself sad and dismal, and that is all the worse for her poor servants. Now she is not in a good-humour, and I came to beg her to do something for me.'

'What is it, then, Pernette? My humours make no difference to you,' said Léonore, smiling very sweetly.

'Mademoiselle, my daughter Jeanneton is in the garden at the foot of the turret-stairs. She has a special message, which she will give to no one but our little princess herself. Will she be wrapped up in this great cloak, and go down to speak to poor Jeanneton?'

'Why could not she come here?' asked Léonore. But she got up, and Pernette hastily put the cloak round her shoulders.

'Dame, she was in a hurry. She had a reason of her own, ma petite.'

Mademoiselle d'Isambert, accustomed to trust her old nurse implicitly, followed her out of the room, and down a winding staircase, which opened by a little turret-door into a corner of the garden between the walls and the moat. A few evergreens made a shelter, and close by there was a bridge of planks laid over the moat for the convenience of the servants, who were thus able to take the shortest way to the village.



A COACHFUL OF GHOSTS.

Jeanneton, in her high starched cap, jacket and short petticoats, was standing on the grass outside the turret-door.

'What have you to say to me, Jeanneton?' said Léonore's low sweet voice in the doorway.

'Would mademoiselle step outside? There was a person who—wished to speak to her—' stammered the femme Bienbon—la Bien-bonne, as her neighbours called her.

'Quick, petite!' whispered Pernette. 'Yonder—in the shadow of those bushes! It is an affair of life and death!'

Though Léonore was timid, she was by no means a coward, and she stepped down from the doorway and glided across the grass, like a slender ghost in the twilight, till she reached the bushes that Pernette pointed out to her. A man was standing there, withdrawn in the shadow. He started forward and kissed her hand.

'Ah, monsieur, is it you!' exclaimed Léonore, under her breath.

'Do not be angry with your poor friend, mademoiselle. Léonore, you know me very well. You trust me, do you not?'

'You need not ask that.'

She raised her pale face, looking at him wistfully. Her own strong feelings had suddenly driven out all thought of the proprieties, of her stern grandmother, of the Chevalier, of the stiff and horrified circle at the château. Her ruling thoughts now were of pride in her lover, and joy in his presence. He was so different from all the other gentlemen she knew, with his frank manners and generous instincts. To compare him with M. de Mazan, it was indeed 'Hyperion to a satyr;' but Léonore's devout comparison was of the Archangel Michael to his great adversary.

One need hardly say that, for anything either of them knew, it might have been a warm summer evening when they stood there under the bush. But after a minute or two a little of the girl's anxious timidity came back to her.

'Is it safe for you to be here?' she whispered. 'Why did you come?'

'Léonore, first, will you do as I ask you? Promise me that.'

'Ah, if I could, mon ami; but I dare not! It is very wicked of me to be here now. But you know those women cheated me. And I am not really sorry, for I longed to thank you for coming that night to warn us, like a good true friend.'

'Then they have not changed their plans? It is still to be THAT TERRIBLE COACH?'

'O yes; and I think it will end in our all dying. I dreamt of it—' and she shivered—'I won't tell you my dream, though you would not laugh at it as my grandmother did. But are you angry, Bernard, that I cannot make you that promise? What did you want me to do? I will do it if I can.'

'Let me take you away with me, now, into safety. You must consent. If you care for me in the least, you will.'

'And leave the others to their fate?' she said, after a moment's pause.

'It is the fate they have chosen for themselves,' he answered passionately. 'Why should these people, in their obstinate running on death, be allowed to drag you with them? It is a horror—an unheard-of tyranny! If you can refuse me now, you never loved me! Come, my angel.'

'How is it that you can save me, and not them?' said Léonore, holding back from him.

'Because you will be safe at

Maury. My father will welcome you as his daughter. And the people have no rage against you—how could they have? But in such times the innocent go with the guilty. You will come with me?’

‘Do not ask me—I cannot!’

‘Ah, then pardon my mistake! I had a foolish notion that you cared for me, mademoiselle,’ said Bernard, setting his teeth, and beginning to walk away.

‘Bernard, stay! If my life would save yours, you would soon see—What am I saying? Be patient, and listen to me. I am very miserable; but one’s duty must come first—you always used to think so. How could I leave my grandmother to go through this danger alone? I have belonged to her all my life—how could I steal away and desert her now like a coward? I always was stupid and cowardly; I know it very well. But this thing I will not do, it is too dishonourable. I am bound to my family, and I must stay with them. Ah, let us both try and bear it bravely. Go away and forget me; that is the best thing you can do.’

‘Then you will stay here and forget me?’ said De Maury.

Léonore shook her head, while her tears ran fast.

‘Well, my queen, my fairy, my crowned saint,’ he said, suddenly falling on one knee, ‘this I swear to you! If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved! You are not angry with me for that? But as to your anger, I see I must risk it.’

‘If you run yourself into danger for my sake, I shall indeed be angry.—Ah, Jeanneton, what is it?’

‘Mademoiselle, Madame la Marquise is coming up-stairs?’

‘Heavens! Adieu, Bernard! If she knew of this, she would kill me!’

M. de Maury watched the white flying figure cross the grass, and dart in at the tower-door. Then he pulled his slouched hat over his face, and slowly and carefully left the precincts of the château. He almost forgot his disappointment, on his way down the hill, in the necessity of making fresh plans. And whatever future dangers and difficulties might be, it was inspiring to find how thoroughly worthy she was—this gentle timid maiden of Grou—of a brave man’s devotion.

CHAPTER IV.

THE next afternoon a family council was held in the salon. Léonore, who had not been called to it, was sitting by the wood-fire in her grandmother’s large room, busy with some embroidery, when her cousin, the young Comtesse, came in and joined her. She walked up to the fire and stood there shivering.

Léonore had never had much sympathy with this youngest of the Mesdames de Grou, whose ways were often those of a child without its attractiveness; but now, lifting her eyes to her face, she saw there something quite new. The Comtesse was flushed and agitated, and was looking down at her cousin with a tearful trembling nervousness.

‘What is it, ma cousine?’ said Léonore. ‘Have you been in the salon? What have they decided?’

‘Something dreadful!’ said the Comtesse. ‘I declare to you, if I live through this night, it will be only to die of terror afterwards. Yes, I know I ought to be ashamed of myself. You may well look surprised; you thought you were the only coward in the house—at least, our grandmother

always says so. But here is another to keep you company.'

'What is it all about?' said Léonore.

'We start to-night, child—imagine! Figure to yourself what a terrible scene it will be! AND THE COACH IS NOT TO COME TO THE DOOR, BUT TO BE DRAWN UP ON THE GREEN YONDER; and we shall drive away by the cart-road into the country, so as to avoid the town altogether. Madame Grandmother and Xavier de Mazan have arranged it all. What do you think of it? To me it seems a detestable plan; but what is my little voice! M. de Grou, of course, obeys his mother, and Madame de Grou has no opinion at all; and François never will disagree with Xavier; so there we are. But if you chose to speak to Xavier, it might make some difference.'

'My dear, you are quite mistaken. I am nobody.'

Léonore had laid her needle down, and was gazing at the red logs. The short afternoon would soon die away into twilight; then would come the evening, AND THEN LIFE OR DEATH! The Comtesse stood beside her cousin, a strange contrast to Léonore's dreamy grace, with her stiff little figure, high heels, and mountain of thickly-powdered hair.

'But why do you dislike this plan so much?' said Léonore, without looking up.

'O, because I hate the dark,' said the Comtesse petulantly. 'I am afraid of it, I tell you, and all the horrid flashing lights; I think it is much more dangerous than daylight. So cold too. I wish we could stay here. I don't believe any one would hurt us. They would be a set of ungrateful monsters if they did. Tell me the truth now, Léonore: do you think we shall be allowed to pass?'

'I don't know—no, I think not.'

'Then it will be the fault of those odious De Maurys.'

The little Comtesse quailed before the angry flash of her cousin's eyes, generally so soft and timid.

'You have no right to say a word against them! If they could save us, we should be safe, though certainly we have not deserved anything from them. De Maury—if nobility went by worth, theirs would be the noblest name in France.'

The Comtesse shrugged her shoulders, threw up her hands, and laughed.

'Well, Léonore, that is very fine, my dear child. You are quite enthusiastic. But if one may venture to advise you, don't let Xavier de Mazan hear anything like that.'

'I do not care what he hears; it makes no difference to me,' said Léonore. 'If one must die, must give up all, it is at least a blessing to have known something good and noble on earth.'

'Mon Dieu, my cousin,' said the Comtesse more seriously, 'is it right for a demoiselle to talk in this way? I assure you one might almost imagine that you were in love with that young De Maury. But I will not be so unkind as to repeat what you say. Only pray take care, and control yourself a little.'

'Why should I hide it, especially now?' said Léonore, looking up into her cousin's face with shining eyes, but without any change of colour or variation of voice. 'If you have found it out for yourself, so be it. I love him with all my heart! And I would rather die to-night than escape safely out of the country and be married—ah!'

Her voice suddenly failed, and she hid her face in her hands, with

something between a groan and a cry.

'Léonore, you freeze me with horror!' said her cousin. 'Heavens! is it possible that I should have lived to hear such words from a relation—from a *demoiselle de Grou*? You feel shame, do you not? You well may. Unwomanly, degraded! I cannot believe my ears! The girl must be mad!'

'No,' said Léonore. 'But I have told the truth, perhaps for the first time in my life, and I am glad of it.'

'And I am sorry,' said the Comtesse, with dignity, 'to find you so unworthy of your name. I will try to forget what you have said, unfortunate girl. A year hence, if we live, you will be thankful to me for not reminding you of it.'

A rustle, and a few measured taps upon the boards, told Léonore that her cousin was leaving the room. She sat still, with her face hidden, cold and stiff with a misery too great for tears. After some time she heard a distant bustle in the château, and sounds of her grandmother returning. In her present state of mind, feeling unable to meet her, she left her frame there by the fire, and went through her own room and up some steps into a little room in the turret, where there was no furniture but a table, a *prie-dieu* chair, and a crucifix on the wall.

Here, in summer, Léonore was accustomed to spend a good deal of her time; no heat could penetrate those old white walls, and only at a certain time in the morning did the sun force his way through the ivy veil of the single loophole-window, and throw a tender garland of leafy shadows round the crucifix. But now the little room was very cold, and already in twilight. Léonore knelt down, hoping presently to feel stronger and calmer. Then she would go

to her grandmother, and once more entreat her to take Bernard's advice, and give up this wild scheme. Perhaps she might listen; if not, by to-morrow at this time where might they not be?

CHAPTER V.

LÉONORE knelt on, her forehead bowed upon the chair, her clasped hands stretched out and drooping forward. The sun was gone down, the hills of Maury had lost their last rosy tints, and the stars were beginning to come out; but it was quite dark in the little oratory, and her prayers had passed insensibly into dreams. At first they were peaceful and pleasant ones, but after a time they changed, and her terrible dream of a few nights before came back to her with more than its first horror: THE COACH DRAWN UP IN THAT STRANGE PLACE—an idea which Madame de Grou had, indeed, boldly utilised—her own agony and terror at being left behind; her escape down the wall; HER OVERTAKING THE COACH AND SEEING THE GHOSTS, WHO NOW SEEMED TO STRETCH OUT THEIR LONG RATTLING HANDS TO SEIZE HER AND DRAG HER IN AMONG THEM—it was all too terrible, and Léonore awoke screaming, and found herself, cold, weary, faint, and trembling, on her knees in the turret-room.

She had no means of knowing the time, but felt sure that she had slept there for hours, it was so very dark and cold. Getting up with difficulty, she moved to the door and tried to open it, but could not succeed; it seemed to be fastened on the outside. Then she knocked, and called 'Pernette' in a voice that seemed to refuse to be heard, feeling all the time as if she was dreaming on still; and

then, as there was no answer, she sat down where she had been kneeling before, and leaning her chin on her hands, gazed up at the narrow window. Through its thick greenish glass she could just discern one star, large and bright, looking in upon her in her loneliness, and suddenly bringing to her mind what Bernard had said the evening before, 'If you will not save yourself, you shall be saved.' She had not thought much about that; it seemed so impossible: she must submit to the same fate as her relations, and no one could save her from it. Still the words roused an instinct of life in her weary mind; she no longer thought she was dreaming, and began to wonder what they were all doing, how she was to get out, whether they had all gone away hours ago, and left her behind. No, that could not be.

Then she noticed some strange shadows and flashes of light which were falling now and then on the arched stone sides of the window, and glimmering on the glass. Sounds began to reach her ears—a rattle of harness, a creaking of wheels, a buzz of many voices. Léonore sprang to her feet, full of a new waking terror of being left behind. Could her grandmother have forgotten her, after all, and Fernette too? Might the door have been locked by mistake, and would she be left here to starve?—for there was no scrambling out of that window, as in her dream! That would be more dreadful than the guillotine. Again she knocked on the door, called, listened, but could hear nothing, and felt sure that the door at the foot of the stairs must be fastened, as well as this. The reality was more dreadful than any dream. Locked up and forgotten! The peasants would perhaps burn the château, and there would be no escape for

her, unless by any chance Bernard knew that she was still there, and came to look for her. Ah, it was too terrible!

She stood shivering in the dark, and did not know what to think or what to do. After watching the lights and shadows on the window as they flashed and fell, an idea occurred to her: she might at least see what they meant. She dragged and pushed the heavy table underneath the window, lifted the chair upon it, and so managed to climb up on the deep sloping window-sill. Claspings the bar with one hand, she opened the window with the other, and plunged it among the frosted ivy-leaves, tearing them from their stalks and scattering them. Then, bending her head forward, she could see the green beyond the moat, and on it a dark mass under a sky of stars, with torches flickering and men crowding about it. It was the Marquis's great coach! The harness-chains rattled, as the horses stamped and tossed their heads, but feet of horses and men were silent on the grass, and Léonore, looking down at them, shivered not only with cold, for the scene was like a wild unearthly dream. The people seemed to be in great haste, running backwards and forwards between the coach and the side-door of the château. Presently the servants stood aside, two advancing with flaring torches in their hands, and six people, two-and-two, came stepping carefully across the grass to the coach-door.

Léonore could not see their faces, but she knew each one well. First, the old Marquise and her son; then the younger Marquise and her son the Comte; then the Comtesse and the Chevalier de Mazan.

Léonore leaned forward as far as she could, and waved her hand

into the frosty darkness, crying out in a voice that trembled and failed,

'Madame, are you going away without me? I am locked up here: you are leaving me behind!'

Perhaps the voice was hardly strong enough to reach her grandmother's ear; yet the old Marquise stopped suddenly and turned back from the coach-door as she was about to get in. There was a pause, a little hurried talk among the group of Léonore's relations. But their momentary hesitation was soon over; to the girl's amazement they got into the coach one after another, the servants drew back, the postilions cracked their whips, and with many a groan and rumble the great vehicle moved off round the grass in the direction of a rough cart-road into the country, by which they hoped to escape any pursuit.

It was Léonore's dream, REPEATED FOR THE THIRD TIME, only she was a prisoner, and reality, fortunately for her, would not let her even try to overtake them. She still clung to her window till the last sound of the coach was lost in the distance, and even afterwards; for, tiring as her cramped posture was, it at least gave her a sight of the stars, and of the dim world on which they were shining. She clung there till another sound rose slowly on her ears—the angry roar of a crowd coming up from the village. They came nearer and nearer, crowding up the hill, till she could see the flare of the torches they carried, and hear their voices, which seemed to die away into a low resolute growl as they approached the château. But a few words were carried to her by a light cold wind which swept over their heads, and then rustled the leaves beside her window:

'FIRE, FIRE! BURN THE WILD BEASTS IN THEIR DEN!'

Léonore felt her brain reeling, and her senses failing suddenly. She let herself slip from the window-sill to the table, and then to the floor, where she fell down heavily and lay still.

CHAPTER VI.

MADemoiselle d'ISAMBERT woke from her fainting-fit to find herself outside the château, on the edge of the moat, in the dark shadow of those same trees and bushes under which she had met her lover the evening before. He was beside her now, supporting her head on his arm, and her hair and face were wet with the cold water that he had been splashing over her. Cold it was indeed, for the moat was partly frozen, but perhaps it answered his purpose all the better.

'Léonore,' he whispered, 'keep yourself perfectly still. We are in great danger, but I shall save you. Can you stand up? I am afraid to let you lie on this grass.'

With the instinct of obedience that seldom failed her, she rose at once, and stood leaning on his arm. But the things she had seen were not to be forgotten, even in the peace and safety of his presence.

'THEY ALL WENT AWAY IN THE COACH,' she whispered, 'AND LEFT ME BEHIND. Did my grandmother forget me? O, what could it mean?'

'Patience! You will know all some day; and your grandmother will be glad too,' said Bernard, his voice trembling a little as if he was deeply moved.

'Are they safe, do you think? I wonder why she went without me. I wish I knew. What are all those people doing out there?'

They have not burnt the château yet?"

'No. When they are gone, I will take you away to a safe place.'

Bernard stood quite still, holding her fast, and listening intently to all the strange noises that broke upon the beautiful night, the hoarse voices, the tramping feet, the wild laughter and cries of triumph, inside and outside of the whole building. Lights were flashing in the windows, and many of the mob were busy destroying and pulling to pieces the stately rooms; but many, too, were waiting outside for something, and presently a horrid yell announced that it was coming. The Vicomte de Maury knew very well what it was, and drew his rescued treasure a little closer. To her it was still like a dream; only now, under all the terror, there was a vague sense of happiness.

Slowly rumbling along the uneven road, heavy wheels were approaching the château. The horses' feet could not be distinguished from the tramp of many men that accompanied them. It was with a certain frightful solemnity, worthy of the Great Revolution, that THE MARQUIS DE GROU'S COACH WAS ESCORTED BACK TO HIS OWN DOOR. From their hiding-place Bernard and Léonore saw it come slowly up, saw the crowd part to receive it, saw it stop where it had stopped before, and, by the lights that were glaring and flickering all about, saw the door opened, and THOSE SIX PEOPLE MADE TO DESCEND. Not that any force was necessary, for each one of them, even the little Comtesse de Grou, stepped out with as calm and proud a grace as if he or she were arriving at Versailles, instead of drawing nearer to the guillotine. Only the old Marquise, as her son gravely offered her his hand to walk into the house, waved him back and

turned towards the mob with an air of fearless command.

'Where is that old traitress, Pernette Flicquet? Can any of you tell me? What has she done with my granddaughter, Mlle. d'Isambert?'

She waited a moment, but met with no answer, and the Marquis, taking her hand, led her once more across their old threshold.

'Ah, let me go to her! I must, I must!' exclaimed Léonore.

'No, Léonore, you shall not,' said Bernard de Maury.

She was half fainting again, and the strong young man lifted her in his arms like a child, and carried her across the moat by the plank-bridge, down the hill and across the valley to his father's house, while all the good patriots of the neighbourhood were occupied in sacking the Château de Grou, before escorting its owners away

To Prison and the Guillotine!

The one that was saved of that doomed family found herself a prisoner too, but her gaolers were the Vicomte de Maury, old Pernette, and Jeanneton. It was not till many days after that terrible night that she was calm and well enough to listen to the history of how it all happened.

Of course she had been locked in the oratory by friendly hands. The departure of the coach had been hurried on by a rumour which came up that evening from the village, that the people of Grou, led on by a patriot from the nearest large town, would be at the château in an hour's time. The coach was ordered round at once, the last arrangements were hurried through, and only just before starting did the Marquise discover that her granddaughter was missing. The turret-door was locked, and the key had disappeared. Pernette too was nowhere to be found.

The Marquise declared at first that nothing would induce her to start without Léonore; but all the rest of her family were of a different opinion, and even the Chevalier could not see any reason for sacrificing six valuable lives.

Then the little Comtesse had stepped forward, and had said in the hearing of them all: 'I do not think you need disturb yourself, madame. Léonore has probably escaped to Maury. It was only this evening that she confessed to me her love for M. le Vicomte.' After this the Marquise seemed half stunned, and made no further resistance to going with the rest.

When the coach had driven off, Pernette came out of the cupboard hidden with tapestry, where she had sat and listened, admitted M. de Maury at the turret-door, and guided him to the room where they found Léonore insensible: THUS SHE WAS SAVED IN SPITE OF HERSELF.

* * * *

The grandchildren of Madame

la Comtesse de Maury, née de Grou d'Isambert, tell this story to their friends as they show them the old château, still grand, though defaced and half ruined by its experiences of revolution. And then, as we stand looking out on the green parterre beyond the moat, which is now drained and planted as a garden, a fair young Léonore de Maury, with the large frightened blue eyes of her grandmother, looks at us and says, in suddenly lowered tones, 'AND—WILL YOU BELIEVE ME?—TO THIS DAY, ON FROSTY MORNINGS IN JANUARY, ONE SEES THE TRACES OF A COACH AND SIX UPON THE GRASS OUT THERE.'

It seems impossible to doubt her word, but English love of evidence makes us ask the young lady if she has seen these spectral impressions herself. Up go her pretty hands, shoulders, and eyebrows, in despair at our incredulity.

'Mais oui! certainement!'

And after that, what is one to say?

LONDON SOCIETY.

The Christmas Number for 1879.

THE GHOST IN THE BANK OF ENGLAND.

I.

AND why not in the Bank of England?

If I had said in some ruined Rhenish castle, or in some ancient graveyard, or on some lonely wind-swept moor where murderers have swung and rattled their bones in chains, the question would not be worth asking. Nay, there are places in London where a dream-haunted man who walks the streets arm in arm with the past would expect to meet ghosts whose name is legion. If Tower Hill be not the very Brocken, the very heart and centre of ghostland, then these unhappy spirits must indeed be left without a home. If ghosts be memories struggling hard against burial, and giving life to places where life and death have been more strongly intensified than elsewhere, then must the ghosts be as many in London as its bricks and stones. Speaking purely in the language of fancy, I should not be astonished to learn that even ghostly bulls and bears bargained for phantom scrip in Capel-court itself, remembering what mosses of memory gather about gold; and *Lloyd's* should have as many *revenants* as there are wrecks at the bottom of the sea. It is true

that the Bank of England would not be chosen at once by a ghost-hunter as a hunting-ground. It is not more than a hundred and forty-five years old, so that there has scarcely been time enough for a ghost to grow. It has never, so far as I am aware, been the scene of a murder. It is the world's type of substantiality and of reality. It is built upon the rock of strong fact, and carried on, down to its smallest details, by the very perfection of human machinery. It goes to sleep soundly at night, and lives and works only by day. There is scarcely a chink in its substance large enough for the tiniest fancy to be hatched in. And yet, even here, those who have eyes to see might happen to meet some such figure as that of the founder himself, first a Preacher of the Word among the Scotch hills, then a Buccaneer of the Spanish Main, then a Prince of political finance, finally wrecked and ruined upon the shadow of Darien. Fauntleroy and Mathison would be at least as likely to haunt the place where their hearts were as the spirit of a murderer to cling to the scene of his crime. And what has become of the ghosts of Robert Thorne, Merchant Taylor, and of John Kendrick,

and of the Houblons, all buried in the ancient church of St. Christopher le Stock which was pulled down in order that the more important Temple might have wider room to grow in? They must needs prowl about the Bank court, for want of graves wherein to lie.

But it is of no mere historical fancy, termed 'Ghost' by courtesy, of which I am about to tell this story—which is my own. I have no more belief in the ghosts of legend than the majority of men and women. But I have been driven, at bitter cost, and sorely against my will, to learn that not only in Heaven and Earth, but in the Bank of England to boot, are more things than have been hitherto dreamed of by the most imaginative accountants and the most romantic cashiers. It is a true story: and it will accordingly be obvious, as I proceed, why I have thought it advisable, in most instances, to use certain names which will not be found in the Bank records under the identical form that I have given them. I give real names whenever obvious reasons for suppression do not apply.

Most stories end with a marriage. Mine begins with one.

The marriage was my own: and it was also Annie Burdon's. I won't say it was the happiest day of my life; but it was the very happiest up till then. I think we both liked our wedding-day the better for knowing that all our friends and relations on both sides thought us a couple of lunatics. The suspicion that they were very likely right gave a zest of romance to our hand-in-hand plunge into life which is wanting to those who walk quietly into smooth waters. So far as we could make out, our lunacy lay in my having no money and no prospects, and in her having no prospects and no money.

She, as the second cousin of a baronet, should have looked higher, and, as the youngest of a country curate's five daughters, ought to have looked very decidedly richer. I, as a very young surgeon with no private means, ought to have waited till I could buy a practice and a carriage before I invested in a wife as the most expensive part of a medical trade-plant. The truth of the matter is that I had come down to D—to see if the place was really unhealthy enough to make it worth a new comer's while to settle there. I found it nothing of the kind, but I found it admirably suited to find a wife in. So far as the Rev. John Burdon's fifth daughter was concerned, never did a love story run more smoothly. Singularly enough, to decide that the place was not worth trying, and to decide that Annie was the only girl in any place worth marrying, took up precisely the same number of journeys and the same amount of time.

We married—wisely, I thought more than fifty years ago; wisely, I think still, and know. But wisdom is very apt to look like rashness to on-lookers. I believe we only obtained a certain amount of family countenance on the ground that if we did not marry as things were and on the strength of what might be, Annie—whose obstinacy was as well known as her warmth of heart—would outwait every better chance that the years of youth might bring her. After all, a penniless doctor, with all his way to make, was better than nobody, and—well, the long and the short of it is we left D—for London as rich as two young people can be who have not means to live together for more than the space of a honeymoon.

I ought to say that I had been too hard a student to make many

friends, without being brilliant enough to stand out from the mass, and, till I fell in love, without any desire to push myself forward. I had never had more than a student's ambition, who finds in books his only real world; but now all things were changed. My first and foremost duty was to justify Annie's thoroughgoing belief in me by getting on, instead of merely drifting along. I set to work, and conquered my naturally retiring temper by trying very hard indeed.

If I had not been married I should not have tried; but then, on the other hand, the fact that made me try to win seemed to make me fail in winning. We took lodgings in a poor neighbourhood, where many patients might mean a few fees; we economised more and more; and I occasionally earned a guinea or two here and there from the medical journals. But we could not afford to wait, and meanwhile things kept getting worse instead of better. Sympathy sufficed to tell me of what Annie was thinking when she looked so grave: for I was beginning to accuse myself of having wronged the one woman I loved by marrying her. She, I knew, was wronging me by accusing herself of keeping me down; and yet I knew that she, as well as I, would have shared starvation rather than escape it by undoing what we had done. Love did not even look towards the window, though Poverty was knocking furiously at the door.

At last, when things had reached the threshold of the very worst, I was offered the place of surgeon on a ship bound for Jamaica, with a prospect of finding a West Indian settlement at the end of a few voyages. It was the only sort of appointment I had not asked for, because it was the only sort that would necessarily divide me from

Annie; and therefore, as a matter of course, it was the only offer that came to me of its own accord. I was sorely tempted to say no. But there was nothing else to be done; and very shortly I should have to support not only a wife, but a child. That made the parting all the harder and all the more imperative at the same time.

So I made arrangements with my employers to pay my wages to my wife during my sailings, sent her down to her father's, and went on my first voyage.

The *Darien*, which was my ship, had many passengers; but none of them gave me much trouble in my professional capacity save one. But then he made up for everybody.

His name was Julius Mendez—a singular name for an Englishman; but I was told that he represented an old West Indian commercial house which had been established very nearly, if not quite, as long ago as the Spanish times. One of the ladies on board nicknamed him 'the Buccaneer.' But to my fancy he looked much more like a descendant of one of those much more successful free-traders who bought and sold what the pirates and buccaneers took by the strong hand. I have never wondered what became of Captain Kidd's treasures. I expect some of the forefathers of Mr. Julius Mendez, and others like them, could account if they pleased for every dollar, and had sent it down to their remote descendant in company with their features. Mr. Mendez was a small, dried-up, bilious-looking man of between fifty and sixty, with a black fringe round a yellow bald scalp, a long hooked nose, and a pair of sharp black eyes round which had been pressed the claws of a whole flock of crows. His whole face was pinched and keen; his expression,

harassed, eager, and yet not without dignity. People who knew something of him at home said he was a miser; others, who professed to know him better, said that, whatever one hand scraped in, the other threw away in all sorts of solitary self-indulgences that men call pleasures. Nobody spoke well of him, and most seemed a little afraid of him. In manner, he was always polite, but never cordial.

But I had not been twenty-four hours at sea before I found out his ruling passion, or rather his ruling terror. It was a morbid dread of death, and a perpetual fear that he was going to die, which almost amounted to a monomania. He undoubtedly had a very sluggish liver, but that did not account for such exaggerated symptoms of hypochondria. From the moment he found out I was the surgeon, I had no peace with him. He discovered some new and alarming symptom in himself every day at least, and more often twice or thrice every day. I expect, from his talk, that he studied medical books whenever he was alone, and cultivated the art, common enough, of feeling in himself every new symptom of which he read. I had to treat Mr. Mendez for heart, stomach, brain,—every organ that he had about him, or rather to treat him for liver disease while affecting to treat him for these. And yet, where health was not concerned, he was no coward. The Darien was once in real peril; and while the other passengers were thinking of the boats, Mr. Mendez had no thought but for an itching in the nose, which he had heard was a symptom of incipient brain-softening. At last, I did not know whether most to detest or to pity Mr. Mendez.

The day before we were due at Kingston, said he,

‘Mr. Wilson, I want to make a

bargain with you. I have the greatest possible objection to every medical man in Jamaica; and if I had not, there is none that could give me his whole time. The fact is—it is nothing to me whether you believe it or not—I am in the most imminent peril of dying by some bodily disease before the end of my fifty-seventh year. I shall be fifty-seven on the tenth of September; and if I once pass that date alive, I may safely look forward to nearly forty years of increasing health and happiness. Of course you think I am talking nonsense; but that is not the question. Perhaps I am an astrologer; perhaps the mystery of Ob—which you are aware the black slaves brought with them from Africa to America, and which has never died—is something very different from the mere fetish worship which you doctors of mere science suppose. The question is that *I* am convinced of what I say, and with what *I* know to be reason. But my death is a threat only, not a doom, and is avertable by unsleeping skill. You are a stranger to Jamaica—you are young—you are free from other engagements—you have your whole time—you want money—and I trust your skill and your honour. Stay with me at my place till midnight on the tenth of September; it will be worth your while.’

I certainly felt disposed to transfer my attentions from the liver to the brain. But, in any case, what harm should I do by accepting the offer? Men with a fancy like that upon them have been known, and that not seldom, to die of their fancy. Some sort of disease he must have, whether of brain or otherwise, that wanted watching; and it was only too true that I wanted money as much as any man. I did not like my patient, nor did I like the prospect of be-

ing shut up alone with him for two months to come ; but I had already learned that beggars must not be choosers. In short, I became private and confidential physician to Mr. Julius Mendez.

Mr. Mendez carried on his business at Kingston ; but he carried me with him to a sugar plantation near Trelawney, in the western part of the island. I was nominally at liberty to pass the greater part of my time in my own way, but in effect I seldom had an hour of liberty. Mr. Mendez had few neighbours, and saw none of them. He devoted himself to the discovery of symptoms, and I had to be on the spot to kill them as they came. His household consisted only of some black servants ruled over by an old mulatto woman, who acted as cook, nurse, and housekeeper ; and I had to draw up recipes for dishes as if they were prescriptions. It was in vain that I tried the effect of horse-exercise, regular living, and open air. He followed all my directions with business-like care and punctually ; and though the man grew to be as well as one who keeps a liver can ever expect to be, nothing would disabuse him of his central and ruling idea. 'Why should he dread death so much?' I often thought. 'He has nobody else to live for.'

I gathered little or nothing from others about his history or character, and indeed he had somehow made me feel it to be a sort of honourable understanding between us that I was not to inquire. He certainly held a good position in the island, and it was hard to say whether the higher families held aloof from him or he from them. At the end of the first month he paid me fifty guineas—the amount agreed upon—which I immediately sent off to Annie. And so there was half my time gone. So eager was I for the tenth of Sep-

tember that I made a table of days like a schoolboy impatient for the holidays, scoring each one off as it went by. At last, thank Heaven, the tenth of September came.

Never shall I forget the state of Julius Mendez on that fatal day. He was far too preoccupied to have symptoms. He had tried to sleep late, but anxiety and excitement woke him early. He spent the whole day till six in the evening in an armchair with his fingers on his pulse, and with me by his side. He made me know what the temptation to strangle a man means. At six o'clock I made him take some food ; but he trembled at every morsel. At seven he began to grow feverish ; at nine I began to be seriously alarmed. No doubt he was getting terrified out of his senses—but he might die of imagination. I gave him an opiate, hoping that he might sleep till past the fatal hour. But it did not act on his excited brain. And so, at last, the remaining three hours dragged by—and, at last, struck the first stroke of twelve.

He rose from his chair, and leaned on me, counting them as they fell slowly : 'Ten—eleven—twelve !'

I don't think that I should myself have been surprised had he dropped down dead at the last chime. But, on the contrary, he drew a deep sigh of relief, and turned to me triumphantly.

'Thank you, Wilson,' said he, taking my hand. 'You've given me a forty years' lease of life, and I thank you. I am now fifty-seven years old, and have the best part of life still to come. I don't want you to think me inhospitable or ungrateful, but I shall be obliged by your leaving me to-morrow morning without seeing me again. Thanks to you, I've done with doctors now. Here is your second cheque for

fifty guineas. By noon to-morrow I shall expect to hear you are gone.'

I certainly thought that my dismissal, under the circumstances, was odd and abrupt; but I was used to the eccentricities of Mr. Mendez, and was so utterly sick of them that I was glad at heart to be thus allowed to run away as soon as my time was out without seeming ill-mannered. I thanked him for his cheque, which was made payable in Kingston: we shook hands, and parted, and that was the last I ever saw of Mr. Julius Mendez of Trelawney.

Matters had been so arranged—I fancy by the special intervention of Mr. Mendez—that I was to return on board the *Darien* in a week or two. Meanwhile I sent the bulk of the second cheque to Annie, keeping only a few pounds to last me till the day of sailing. But, before that day came, the low-lying sugar-lands in which I had been living had done their work—I was prostrate with yellow fever.

II.

I LOOKED like a ghost myself when one day, long afterwards, I reached my father-in-law's at D——. Had I been a real ghost, nobody could less have expected to see me. I had written, of course, from Kingston as soon as I was strong enough to hold a pen; but my letter had never been delivered—the Burdon family had been scattered to the winds. My father-in-law had died a month ago. One of the sons, however (I learned in the village), had gone into an auctioneer's office in the county town, and I got there, by walking—weak as I was, I had not money enough to carry me otherwise. Tom Burdon was a young Englishman of the sort that makes a point of never being surprised at anything, or being

glad to see anybody. He told me that one brother was here, another there, and both doing badly; that the sisters were looking out for situations, and that Annie was—thank God for that!—there, with him.

'And by the way,' he added, as if it were an after-thought, 'she's got a baby with her. I suppose you'll stop and dine?'

Need I describe such a meeting? For full five minutes I was happier than I had been even on my wedding day. The poor girl had shown her characteristic obstinacy by insisting on it that I must be dead, while everybody else would have it that I had deserted her to relieve myself of a burden. To her, it was as if her own true heart had called me from the grave. And then she gave me our child, whom she had thought an orphan. We had happiness enough for that one day.

But—for the future days? It was desperate to think of them; well nigh impossible to face them. My health had terribly given way—it would have been certain death to return to Jamaica for at least a year, and then it would be useless and out of my power. I had thrown away the only opening into practice into which I had ever put my finger. Annie had no saleable accomplishments even if I could have brought myself to let her use them when I was doing nothing; and then she was a young mother, whose hands were overfull. Stolid Tom Burdon had been as good as gold to both mother and child; but he had already done more than it was fair he should do, even for a widowed sister. Well, I must give up all my professional hopes and get a situation in some sort of office, like Tom—plain reading, writing, and arithmetic are after all the only useful kinds of learning in time of need.

Worry and anxiety preyed upon me more and more, as the days slipped away and brought me nothing; and my health kept growing worse instead of better. My failing strength led to a state of nervous prostration, in which the superstitious fancies of my late patient seemed much less absurd to me than when I had been well and strong. It was almost as if he had decoyed me to his detestable sugar plantation, where all sorts of wild notions and strange practices lingered among the neighbouring Maroons, in order that he might convey to himself the additional years of health and life which had been given to me—as if there were only a certain amount of human vitality in the world, so that what one man gains he must needs take from another. Of course I knew such a fancy to be the merest nonsensical nerve-trick; but I seemed at that time to see and hear everything more clearly than one possibly can in a normal state of the brain, so that substances often became shadowy, and shadows substantial. I could not help seeing that my anxieties reflected themselves doubly in my poor wife, and that she was haunted by some feeling about me which she dared not name to herself, but which I understood perfectly well. We had one very substantial comfort, however—the boy throve exceedingly.

I knew all the time that my nervous state was simply the result of bodily weakness, and that it would pass if only I could contrive to get strong. I need not recount the way in which we managed to live through those bitter weeks—the very few pounds I made by my pen; the sale of little personal treasures, which we had kept throughout our original poverty; the chance scraps of employment I found in the town—and so

on, and so on. It was all heartless and hopeless, and every penny I made seemed to make getting the next harder instead of easier.

But one day, when I was at Annie's writing-desk (not yet doomed to be sold) looking for a pen wherewith to write something or other for a local journal, my eye fell on an unopened letter directed to 'Andrew Wilson, Esq., M.D., care of Mrs. Wilson, D—Rectory, near —, England.' It had been posted in Spanish Town as far back as the 12th of September.

'Bless me!' said Annie, as I held it up to her, 'I put that letter away for you when it came; and then everything put it out of my head.'

And well it might—the loss of her father, the breaking up of her home, the supposed death of her husband and his return, and the birth of her boy. I opened it—it contained a letter and another envelope, sealed, and also addressed to me.

• The letter was as follows :

'September 12th, 188—.

My dear Wilson,—You must have thought it strange that I did not recognise your success farther than by the fee which you would have received had you failed. I said nothing at the time, because, firstly, I felt sure you would make a fuss about receiving more than your due, and because I wanted all the thanks, in that supreme moment of my life, to be spoken by me; and secondly (to be frank) because I did not wish to enable you, for reasons of my own, to remain in Jamaica. Having learned from you Mrs. Wilson's address, I send this to await your arrival at home. Pray be kind enough to accept it, by way of thanks, from yours very faithfully,
JULIUS MENDEZ.'

I tore open the second envelope—it contained this :

' London, the 12th September 183—.

To the Chief Cashier of the Bank of England.

Pay to Andrew Wilson, Esq., M.D., or Order, One Thousand Pounds.

£1000 0 0

JULIUS MENDEZ.'

Could it be a dream that I held in my hand a piece of paper worth a thousand pounds, and for my own? Why, it meant everything—health, ease of mind, and a strong wedge to drive into the world! Annie started across the room to me—she thought I was fainting. And all this weary while we had had a fortune between our fingers! No wonder that, for a moment, I took it for some practical joke such as they play in dreamland, between sleeping and waking. A cheque for a thousand pounds on the Bank of England is just what a man in my plight would dream of, just as the starving dream of feasting.

But it was real enough—there it lay, tangible and true, before Annie's eyes and mine. Of course I had no real scruple about accepting it: Julius Mendez was certainly not the man to spend more upon others than he could amply afford, and, in truth, it had once or twice occurred to me that the incessant services of two such months and their consequences had been rather poorly paid for, though of course I had no right to complain. The least possible hesitation about taking so handsome and generous a gratuity, otherwise than as a loan to be repaid from its hoped-for results, I could not help feeling; but, in any case, I had not only myself to think of; there were Annie and the boy. The cheque had all the air of being a gift from the skies,

of which gratitude as well as need forbade refusal. I had rather that I had been paid it for what I had really done than for what Mr. Mendez only believed I had done—but then who can tell, in such a case, what one has really done or not done? In short, I accepted the gift—and everybody must decide for himself whether I did right or wrong.

I relieved myself by writing a letter of thanks to my late patient, taking care to let him know how welcome his generosity had become. After consultation with Annie, we decided not to take Tom into our confidence immediately; we wanted to do for him all we could out of our fortune—which seemed to us inexhaustible—and we knew that if he knew its limits just then, he would refuse to take as much as we wanted to give him. So, just for the time, I let him know that I had an unexpected stroke of good fortune, which gave me a professional opening and required my immediate presence in town. And he, who made a point of being never either glad or sorry or surprised or interested or curious about anything, simply said, 'Very well.'

It is not good to think that money should have any effect upon such sacred things as the joys and sorrows of a wife and mother—but, though it is not good to think, it must be good to be; for it is true. I saw in Annie's face, and heard in her voice, how much things had suddenly changed with me—hope was born again. We had not dared, for weeks, to mention our future; to-night we talked of it almost till the sun rose. Our united knowledge of business was small, and possibly our plans ran a little wild, but still they were feasible. So much, added to what I might earn, would enable us to live for a year while I was recover-



THE MOMENT OF TERROR.

ing and looking out for the best means of starting fairly—supposing we had to wait so long; if not, there would be so much saved. A second so much should be made a fund for the purchase of a partnership or practice. A third so much should enable me to insure my life for another thousand. The rest should go as far as it would in pushing forward Annie's brothers and sisters—more particularly Tom.

Next morning I started for London, feeling, like almost everybody who has never had any dealings of the smallest consequence with Banks and Bankers, that I had to cash my cheque and receive my own money with my own hands, before opening an account with it elsewhere. I spent almost my last shilling on an inside place in the London coach, with a cheque for a thousand pounds safe in my pocket-book.

I happened to have but one fellow traveller—an old gentleman named Deacon, with whom I had become slightly acquainted. He was a fine old fellow, who in his eighty-seventh year was more hale, sound, and active than most men are at sixty—one of the best examples of a sound mind in a sound body that I ever knew. He had been in business in London a generation or two ago, but had retired upon a competence among his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and was as well known in his native town as the steeple, where he was respected and consulted upon all subjects by all people. His one senile symptom was a formidable propensity to tell anecdotes of his younger days, without telling them very well; but, strange to say, he seldom told the same twice over. I rather sadly contrasted my feeble self, scarcely more than a third of his age, but wrapped up thickly from every

least draught that could blow, with this hale old man, who, though it was one of the bleakest days of a biting spring, scorned even a single greatcoat or wrapper, and only, out of consideration for me, insisted on closing the windows.

'Going all the way to town?' asked Mr. Deacon, in his strong hearty voice, that seemed able to knock a man down and pick him up again.

'Yes—on business,' said I, a little proud of so new a word.

'So am I, worse luck. I'm going to give our Member a bit of the town's mind about the town pump—you've got no energy among you, all you boys. I mean to be at it though, till the new one's built, if it takes me twenty years, and I daresay it will: it took me ten to get the free library, but I got it—I oughtn't to grudge twice the time to get what's of twice the consequence to ten times the number. Which way shall you be going? If you're anywhere near Westminster about dinner-time, I shall be glad of your company.'

'I have to go to the Bank of England.'

'What—to my old shop? I haven't been in Threadneedle-street these forty years. But I believe I should go as straight to my old desk as if it had been yesterday. Yes—I was a paying-clerk there in the old times. If you go through the door in the left-hand corner of the court, you'll see where I used to stand; and if you've got anything to be cashed—and I hope it's a good big something—my great-great-great-great-grandson in office will cash it for you. By Jupiter, sir, I wonder when I think of it if a bank-desk doesn't feel itself to be the real body and soul of the whole thing, and the clerk behind it only a pair of hands that

it gets new from time to time. It's a fact that some desks are lucky and some unlucky, and that some go right and some go wrong. There's some that a young man gets promotion from as sure as he stands there, and some that keep the same man for ever, as if he was a barnacle on a ship's side. We used to notice it, in my time—mine was always an easy-going sort of a desk: I wouldn't mind laying a wager that the clerk at it now is an honest sort of easy-going man.'

'That's a curious theory, Mr. Deacon.'

'It isn't a theory at all—it's a fact, sir. Of course there are exceptions. Now the desk next to me was one of the downright unlucky ones. Bad in every way. I knew both the clerks there in my time—that of course; but I mean I knew rather more of them than anybody. The desk on the other side was a lucky one; men went up high in the Bank from it, as if it was a step in a ladder. Mine was betwixt and between, both in place and in luck; and all the better for me, say I. But about that unlucky desk.' He settled himself back, stretched out his legs, and made ready for the inevitable anecdote of his younger days. 'Of course you've heard all about the White Lady of Threadneedle-street?' said he.

'I fancy I've read something of her—but that's all.'

'Then I'll tell you. When I first stood at the Bank counter, my left-hand neighbour—on the unlucky side—was a young fellow of the name of Frederick Hawes: Fred Hawes, we used to call him, for he was one of them that are made to be Bobbed and Jacked and Freddeed by all the world. He was a fine jolly young chap, with any quantity of spirit in him; we all liked him, and two or three

of us, who got to know him best, liked his sister too, Nancy Hawes. She was a prettier girl than I've seen these fifty years; since the time when pretty girls went out and ugly bonnets came in. She and her brother Fred lived with an old aunt in Finsbury—in Windmill-street it was—and I've had tea there with aunt Polly scores of times, and punch there with Fred scores of times more. Poor Fred—poor Nancy! She helped out the housekeeping by doing sewing for an army clothier, and was as good as gold, and fonder of her brother than any girl I ever knew. She just sewed her fingers to the bone to keep him more like a fine gentleman than he'd any right to be, and she'd have cut off her head to please him. I'm not talking about the fine bankers' clerks of nowadays; I'm talking of things more than sixty years ago, when I was five-and-twenty, and so was King George. I believe six of us asked her to marry us six times a piece—I did, I know. But she laughed at us all round, and made us better friends with her than ever. "Brother Fred must marry first," she used to say; and we knew she meant it—she didn't think there was a man fit to clean Fred's shoes. From which, Mr. Wilson, you will doubtless surmise that Master Fred's shoes weren't worth blacking. For, take my word for it, sir, the way to make a sweetheart or a sister or a mother worship the ground you tread on is to be a silly young scamp, without the head of a sparrow-grass or the heart of a cabbage.'

'I hope not,' said I.

'I know it,' said Mr. Deacon. 'But there was one of our set that didn't take No like the rest of us. Isaac Ayscough was his name. He was older and closer than the rest, and the only one that never talked about Miss Nancy. And some-

how, he was the only one with whom she never seemed to be easy or friendly. I know now, putting this and that together, and having near ninety years' knowledge of the world, that he loved her with all his soul, and that she knew it, and that it made her think of him—half frightened and half pleased—so that she couldn't laugh and chat as she did with us others. We all looked up to him. He was not only older, but he was cleverer, and better at business and pleasure, and stronger-willed and harder-headed (and harder-hearted, may be), and could drink more punch and spend more money. I fancy, too, he was of better birth; but of that I'm not sure. Any way, as time went on, there seemed to come a kind of breach among us all—poor Nancy got less cheerful, and Fred less sociable, and at the same time more intimate with Ayscough, until we others hardly saw anything of any of them. Fred was always sweet and friendly with me, all the same, when we met—which of course was every day from ten to three; and often I used to think he wanted to tell me something, but didn't dare, though I encouraged him all in my power. And all the while he was with Ayscough more and more. I once spoke to Nancy about it—but she only cried, and “*I hate Isaac Ayscough!*” said she. I knew that she knew that Ayscough was leading poor Fred wrong, though nobody could tell how; and I know now that Ayscough was working in some villainous underhand way to get Fred into trouble, so that he might get Nancy into his power. Any way, God forgive me if I'm wrong. . . . Well, sir, one day it came out—it was in the year '69, just when the news came of the Boston riots—how a signature had been forged to a transfer warrant; and then—

‘Hawes and Ayscough were the forgers?’

‘I don't know, sir. I only know that Isaac Ayscough discovered the forgery, and that Fred Hawes was—Hanged. In 1769.’

‘Hanged?’

‘Why not? They hadn't made it transportation then. Why I can remember when three hundred and fifty-two men and women were sentenced to be hanged for forgeries on the Bank of England in one single year—all but one a day. What was one more? No, sir—Threadneedle-street isn't what it used to be in my time. But I was telling you of that desk, Mr. Wilson. I don't believe Ayscough meant poor Fred Hawes to be hanged. I'm not sure that Fred—mind, I say *Fred*—committed the forgery. But when a man once puts his shoulders to send one of the devil's stones down hill, down to the bottom goes the stone, and wishing can't stop it. I won't go so far as to think, out loud, that Ayscough found it needful to get the brother out of the way—say in gaol—that he might get hold of the sister. I won't suggest that he did what he found needful. But, all the same, he was a close, masterful, passionate man; and if I say what I *don't* think is true, then I do say that the Bank of England has been the scene of one of the bloodiest sins ever dealt with by the gallows.’

‘And the girl?’

‘Ah, poor Nancy! That's the worst part of it all; unless madness is a better thing than becoming the mistress of a murderer. The day after the hanging, when Ayscough was just leaving his desk—no doubt for Windmill-street—in walks poor Nancy, dressed all in white as if for a wedding, and goes straight up to Ayscough, and asks him sweetly, ‘Is my brother, Mr. Frederick, here to-

day? Ayscough didn't answer her. But though I was ready to break down at the sight, I saw how things were, and that she was thenceforth wholly in God's hands, and said, just as quietly as if nothing had happened, and as if I'd never seen her before, 'No, Miss—not to-day.' And so it went on, day after day, week after week, year after year. Every day, at twelve o'clock noon, she used to cross the Rotunda to Ayscough's desk at the pay-counter, and ask, 'Is my brother, Mr. Frederick, here to-day?' And one of the clerks always used to answer, 'No, Miss—not to-day.' And then she always said, 'Give my love to him when he returns, and say I'll call to-morrow.' Poor thing! She was harmless, and never came to any harm; and some of us helped her aunt to keep her. But one to-morrow she didn't come. And then she was buried—poor girl! If Ayscough wanted her, there's no doubt but he went too far. Yes, sir, the Bank of England *has* been the scene of the foulest and bloodiest sin that ever was *not* dealt with by the gallows!

'And Ayscough? What of him?'

'I never spoke to him after, and he never spoke to me. By a queer chance, he'd been at the lucky desk before; after Fred's death he was shifted to the unlucky one, where Fred had been. I suppose he didn't like to make any objection. We stood side by side, paying cash over the counter for many years, without exchanging a word. I noticed it was the same between him and the clerk on the other side of him. He didn't rise. For twenty-five years he kept on standing there, while everybody left or went over his head, till the old story was forgotten, and he had neighbours who spoke to him. At fifty he had become a strange, solitary, friend-

less old man. He was punctual in all his duties; he turned into a sort of machine. At ten he came to his desk. At one he ate three biscuits of the same size and kind. When he left the Bank he went to a queer, out-of-the-way chop-house, where he always ate two chops and drank two pints of port one after the other. At nine in the evening he went out of sight, and nobody knew what became of him till ten o'clock next day. And at last *he* died, without warning, in a little lodging in Hackney. That was the life, sir, of Isaac Ayscough, whom we all thought destined to set the Thames on fire and to be a great man—and all because he went from one desk to another. While here am I, who never had one-tenth of his brains, alive and jolly at near ninety years old, without one day of my life that I wouldn't have the living of over again—except that I'd put the pump before the library. But here's our journey's end. Good-day, Mr. Wilson, and thank you for your company.'

III.

THE wholesome bustle of the streets soon drove this rather ghastly reminiscence of old Mr. Deacon's youth, which had entered at one ear, out at the other. Though I had spent the greater part of my grown-up life in London, I was not familiar with the City; and I took a certain sort of fanciful pleasure that I, too, was for the day a small cog-wheel in the perpetual machine for making money change hands. Strength of heart and strength of limb seemed stirred up in me by the noise and the two meeting crowds. I felt myself a rich man; and if I built airy castles rather *Alnaschar-wise*, I really possessed a solid

foundation for at any rate a very comfortable cottage on firm ground.

And so there stood the Bank of England, waiting, without a question, to pay over a thousand of its pounds into my hands. I entered the outer court, and was duly directed by a gorgeous beadle in black and scarlet to the first door in the left-hand corner. I found myself in a large office—which I have no doubt is well known to the greater number of my readers—with twelve desks ranged alphabetically and facing a quiet courtyard filled with trees and shrubs, in the centre of which a fountain plashed lazily. I had expected that in this true heart of the City the bustle of the streets would have been doubled. But an almost monastic stillness, through which the ticking of the clock could be heard plainly, made the presentation of my cheque at one of the central desks feel like part of an impressive ceremonial. I went to one of the windows in front of the desks, and looked out at the as yet flowerless rhododendrons which a very slightly exaggerated sentiment might liken to a soul of flowers within a heart of gold. I took up a pen, and wrote on the back of the cheque 'Andrew Wilson.' Then I stood for a moment or two, hesitating as to which of the desks marked 'G—O' should honour the cheque of Julius Mendez.

Presently, by some slight chance or other, my eyes met those of a clerk standing behind the counter, who, seeming to notice my hesitation, beckoned to me with his eyes or with his hand—with which, I can hardly say. There were two clerks at his desk: one, in the middle, was engaged in making entries, and did not seem to notice me; the clerk whose attention I had caught was standing a little behind the other's left shoulder,

but still close to the counter. The first time that a poor man goes to cash a fortune, he notices every little thing as a part of the history of an adventure. But there were other reasons why I, or anybody of an observant turn, should notice the clerk who had beckoned me towards him. He certainly did not look likely to go out of his way to be polite to anybody.

He was a shrivelled, withered old man, who in appearance, though probably not in years, might have been the father of Mr. Deacon. It is necessary for me to describe him, though he was nothing to me save in his capacity of an automaton for paying me a thousand pounds on demand. But, as I have said, under such circumstances as mine, one takes note of everything. And yet I don't know that I should have observed him at all had it not been for the very obtrusivesingularity of his costume. It was very odd that a Bank clerk, however old, should still persist in dressing himself after the fashion of his grandfather when his grandfather was a young man. He wore a snuff-coloured coat of quaker cut, with huge flapped pockets in the skirts; a flower-patterned silk waistcoat, over which a gold watchguard ran upwards from a fob; and his neck was swathed in at least a dozen folds of snow-white cambric, starched and frilled. Unless he muffled himself up in the largest and loosest of greatcoats when he left the Bank, I would not give much for his chance of not being followed by a long train of small boys. The lower part of his person was hidden by the counter; but in such wise, as to their superior parts, must those have been clothed to whom came, in 1769, the news to which Mr. Deacon had alluded of the riots in Boston. But the eye soon shifted from the clothes to the

face and figure of the man who wore them.

It was simply the most hideous, ghastly face I had ever seen in a human being. In some ways it is indescribable; but for that very reason I must try to describe it as best I can. Hideous and ghastly as it was, the features were not ill formed—it is not impossible that they might have been regularly handsome once upon a time; only it must have been a long time ago. The contour of cheeks and chin was oval, the nose straight, and the eyes of a rich hazel; the brow was square and full. But the lips had shrivelled up into a parchment-like substance that stretched back so as to display two rows of broken black fangs. The skin of the face had aged into the semblance of badly stretched leather, through which the bones seemed bursting their way. The complexion was of a thin corpse-like gray, which ought to signify some strange disease, but which to my eyes looked as if the hand, not of any disease, but of Death itself, had passed over it and left a shadow. The cheeks had grown so hollow as to have become lost in the jaws. A thin circle of hair just prevented the wrinkled scalp from being wholly bald; the dark eyes were sunk in deep cup-like cavities; the nasal cartilage was of a livid blue. The man's head seemed to be degenerating, before death, into the skull of a living skeleton. But, ghastly as all this was, it was not all.

There was expression. I do not profess any especial skill in physiognomy; but some faces are to be read by a child without any chance of error, even if what they tell has been hitherto unfamiliar. This was the face of a living man who had died in sin—who had literally died, and yet who still lived on. I have said that, in some

ways, it is indescribable. This is what I meant; and I can describe it, or rather its effect, in no other way. Even while it beckoned me with what, after the first moment, I could only call an obsequious grin, it was filled with a glow, not of remorse, which is for the living, but of that final despair which is for the dead alone. Even so would a corpse look which had murdered not only bodies, but brains, hearts, and souls. Even so would such eyes look as are the phantom windows of some soul in hell. I am not exaggerating. I have called this one of those faces which are absolutely plain to read; and to see such a face, and such a figure so costumed, behind a Bank counter, was startling enough to make every least detail of expression fix itself in the memory.

The sunken, hungry, desperate, deadly eyes looked like the reservoirs of the fire by which the flesh of the body was being slowly consumed. The clothes hung loosely, as if they had been made for a much taller and stouter wearer. To judge of the rest by the head, they might have covered a corpse half way on the road to being a skeleton, which the grave-worms had already half devoured. Every now and then a livid flush flitted over the ashiness of the gray. How the well-dressed young clerk at the middle of the desk could bear to have such a suggestive incarnation of deadly sin unrepented of, but self-devouring, at his elbow, I could not understand. I had only time to notice two more details when the eyes attracted me again with a look of unutterable famine.

The first was a very remarkable scar, something in the shape of the letter Y—the stem descending down the left cheek, one limb branching diagonally across the forehead, and the other stretching

nearly to the highest point of the ear. The colour of this scar was of a reddish purple. The second note was of dress only. It was a brooch used to fasten the voluminous cambric neckcloth, made of gold, and of a fashion such as I have never seen elsewhere. An oblong frame, slightly convex, and set all round with small seed-pearls, held a glass in the place of a stone; under the glass was a twisted lock of reddish-brown hair, fastened with a true-lover's knot of pearls like those in the setting, and with an 'A' on one side, in like pearls, and an 'H' on the other.

I should certainly have chosen to receive my cash from the other clerk; but he was busy at the moment making his entries, and presently my cheque was in the thin dead-white fingers of the strange and evil-looking cashier who had attracted me. Surely, I thought, appearances must be indeed deceitful if fingers belonging to such a fiendish face as that are trusted by the Corporation of the Bank of England.

'How will you take it?' asked he, in a hoarse vague voice, without any strength or tone. 'Short or long?'

I never heard even a dying voice at the last gasp express such utter abandonment to weariness of being. Before I could answer such a mere routine question, I had to pass my hand over my eyes to make sure I was not looking at, and listening to, a figure in a dream, or rather in a nightmare. The reason was that, in a dream, one hears with the inner ear only; and it was so that I seemed to hear this man's 'How will you take it? Short or long?'

But it was certainly not a dream. With my outer ears I heard the ticking of the clock and the scratching of many quills. My hand was

still passing over my closed eyes while I answered, 'I will take it in one note, if you please.'

I heard a slight crisp rustle. I opened my eyes dreamily; they fell upon a clean bank-note lying before me at the edge of the counter. The very repulsion I felt drew me to look up from the note to the cashier; but he had left the desk; and the same feeling of repulsion which had forced my eyes to his while he was standing close to me kept them from following him now that he was gone.

But the other clerk, at the centre of the desk, was still at his place; and I fancied that, while I took up my note, he eyed me rather curiously. He had no doubt, however, been too much absorbed in his entries to notice that my business was already done; at any rate he half held out his hand as if to attend to me. 'Thank you; I have been attended to,' said I; and he, having looked round him as well as at me a little oddly and absently, returned to the books before him. I took out my pocket-book, and began to fold up the note to stow it away safely in one of the divisions. As I did so, the note seemed to double of itself cross-ways, as if it had been already slightly creased in one direction; but I was too completely unversed in the routine of the Bank of England to take any special heed of so seemingly slight, and to me so meaninglessly, a circumstance just then. But most certainly while I had to bring it into a new fold one way, it seemed to fall crossways into a natural fold; and that is a great deal more singular than it sounds, as anybody who is fortunate enough to possess the materials may learn by experiment, so long as he is sure that the notes he experiments with are new.

But—well, after all, the whole transaction came simply to this: that my cheque had been duly paid by a very singular-looking man, to whom I should have very decidedly objected in the capacity of a fellow-clerk, but whose fingers were fully as good to receive a thousand pounds from as if they had been less like a dead man's. I did not go to Westminster to lunch with Deacon, but took the return coach home. I had left D—— with scarcely more than my fare; I returned to it a rich man.

IV.

My castles proved remarkably well built, considering that they had been built so largely with the bricks of Alnaschar. My change of circumstances soon became known in D——, and it was certainly no fault of mine that my sudden stroke of good luck became considerably exaggerated by popular rumour. It never rains, but it pours; and the saying holds especially true of golden showers. By a piece of really good fortune I became able to step into a vacant practice in D—— itself, on very easy terms, and within only a very few months out of the twelve I had allowed for looking about me. The practice was fairly good to start with, and it grew rapidly, helped at the very outset by two or three strikingly fortunate cures. My health began to come back at magical pace, and everything seemed destined to go on well, thanks to my West Indian patient, to whom I wrote once more, but from whom I never heard again. He was evidently one of those people who are ashamed of doing things that make people feel grateful. I found myself doing so well that I trusted in a year or two to

be able to ask Mr. Mendez to do me the farther favour of letting me send him back what he had advanced me as the repayment of a loan. That I had never really earned so large a fee was the only thing I had on my mind, and that was certainly not a heavy load. As for Annie, all her life was turning back into its natural happiness; and the child was thriving as well as even she could desire. Tom, too, was getting on in his slow and steady way; and the brothers and sisters were being drawn together again, thanks to my gleam of West Indian sunshine. I don't think that Annie and I were labelled lunatics any more.

In speaking of my good old friend Mr. Deacon I ought to have said, or at least I might have said, that he had two sons in the town, both middle-aged men; one was a lawyer, the other was the manager of the branch bank where I had opened my account with my first thousand pounds. The lawyer was Mr. Robert, the bank-manager was Mr. William, and both were very good friends of mine. One afternoon when I happened to be at the bank, Mr. William asked to see me in his private room. I naturally thought it would turn out to be a matter of very ordinary business of either medicine or money; and as he had a natural stiffness of manner very different from his father's, I noticed nothing unusual in his way of receiving me. He had another visitor in the room, who was a stranger to me.

'Wilson,' he said, 'you remember opening your account with us last May?'

'Of course I do.'

'You paid-in a single Bank of England note? Should you know it if you saw it again?'

'I indorsed it with my name.'

'And when we received it from



THE GHOST IN THE BANK OF ENGLAND.

you we entered the number and particulars. Look here.'

'Yes, that is my name; so I suppose that is my old friend.'

'Your name, in your own handwriting?'

'Certainly; I'm not likely to forget every pen-stroke I made in *that* signature. I hope there's nothing wrong.'

'We paid it to a customer of ours who was borrowing money from us on a mortgage; from him it passed back to the Bank of England. There are some reasons that make the Bank of England people a little curious as to its history, and this gentleman here has come down to make inquiry; perhaps you can help him. How long ago did *you* receive this note, and from whom?'

'On the 10th of May. I received it at the Bank of England itself, over the counter.'

The two gentlemen looked at one another.

'You say,' said the stranger, 'that you, on the 10th of May last, received over the counter of the Bank of England this note, any note, of this particular date and number? Is that so? Is that what you say?'

'Certainly. Why not?' asked I.

'Do I understand you would swear it in a court of justice, if need were?'

'I hope there is nothing wrong. But I would certainly swear to that anywhere.'

'And I also hope there is nothing wrong. But there is certainly something very strange. On what account was this note paid into your hands?'

'In payment of a cheque, drawn in my favour by Mr. Julius Mendez of Kingston, Jamaica.'

'To order or to bearer?'

'To order.'

'Can you give me the date of the cheque?'

'The 12th of September last.'

CHRISTMAS, '79.

'You are sure of that?'

'Absolutely sure. But I suppose, if the date is of consequence, you can write to Mr. Mendez, or telegraph to him?'

'Mr. Mendez—' began Mr. Deacon; but the gentleman from the Bank interrupted him:

'You think—that is to say, you would advise us to communicate with Mr. Mendez? Yes; no doubt we can send him a message, if we please. So I understand your account is that you received this identical note over the counter of the Bank of England in payment of a cheque drawn to your order by Mr. Mendez, and dated the 12th of September; and that you received the note on the 10th of May. Is that so? And that you say you are ready to swear? Then in that case I need not detain you longer, or Mr. Deacon. Good-day.'

'What does it all mean? I asked Mr. William Deacon, as soon as the other had gone. 'I hope you are not in any trouble about that note? I don't know yet much about banking, you know.'

'I hope,' he said, 'that nobody will be in any trouble; but I have told all I know about the matter, and so have you. I daresay we shall not hear of the matter again. Will you excuse me? I'm very busy just now, and—'

For perhaps five minutes, till I reached the door of my next patient, I wondered what circumstances could possibly be connected with this note that should lead the Bank of England to send an official down to D—to make inquiries, and hoped that, whatever they might be, I should not be troubled with a subpoena. But by the time I reached my immediate destination the whole thing had passed from my mind, with a wish, as idle as it was slight, that I had taken the note from the hands of some

less strange-looking cashier than he whose appearance of half-wasting corpse, half-wasted skeleton, whole sin-eaten soul, had engraved themselves on my memory, and even now and then returned as a personage in some disagreeable dream when my nerves, not yet wholly strong, chanced to become a little overstrained.

I saw my patients as usual, made some purchases in view of approaching Christmas, and then went home, with my mind as free from any sort of anxiety as a mind can be. And, if I had felt anxious, as unbusiness-like people are apt to feel about business matters, I could have discovered no sort of tangible reason. The cheque had been duly honoured, and the Bank of England could not surely find any fault with a note issued from its own counter. I practically forgot the conversation in Mr. William Deacon's room so completely as not to remember to tell Annie, though I have always told her whatever I remembered to tell her. I remember that we passed a particularly pleasant and happy evening together.

The following afternoon I was in the cell of a London police-station. Within a week I had given bail to meet my trial on an indictment for having forged and uttered a note of the Bank of England for one thousand pounds.

V.

I PASS over the history of that week. I have spoken enough of my mere self; and it is not my purpose, in writing this plain account of a strange affair, to describe the effect of a sudden and unexpected charge of serious crime brought all at once upon a man who thought he had left the worst struggles of life behind him, who

was fortunate in all his outward conditions of life and work, and whose happiness in the inner life of home was growing day by day. Such sudden downfalls require no help for the imagination to realise them better without words than with them. I don't know that a consciousness of innocence, though so complete as to amount to ignorance, is much comfort in such cases. The guilty man has a comfort forbidden to the innocent—the consciousness that he is being treated justly, and the relief of being no longer compelled to live a lie. I had the one great comfort of Annie's inexhaustible love and trust; but then, had I been guilty, I should have had this all the same.

I have said that I had found bail, old Mr. Deacon being one of my sureties, partly out of friendship, but partly, I have no doubt, thanks to his overflowing energy, which compelled him to mix himself up actively with the affairs of everybody. Mr. Robert Deacon acted as my legal adviser; he was a shrewd, careful lawyer, but the case puzzled him as much as it baffled me. Whether he believed me guilty, I know not; but if he did not, he was more credulous than even I should have been.

The case was this. It has always been the practice of the Bank of England never to reissue a note, but to burn every note that returns to it; visitors to the Bank may have been shown, by way of curiosity, a charred mass consisting of the ashes of millions of pounds. Now on a certain day a note for 1000*l.*, bearing a certain number and other marks of identification, had, in the usual course of business, been returned to the Bank and duly burned with others. Of that there could be no question, unless there had been a conspiracy among many officials to save it from the fire. Some time afterwards a sur-

geon without practice, known by all who knew anything of him to be in a state of destitution, and as much without prospects as means, paid into the bank at D—a note corresponding in every recorded particular with the note which had been destroyed. My antecedents were very far from being in my favour, at any rate unless Mr. Mendez could be brought from Jamaica to confirm, partially, my own account of some part of them. I had, till within a few weeks of paying in the note, been wholly lost sight of by my own family. It is true I could say that I had been nearly dying of yellow fever in Jamaica; but that would have to be proved, and proof would take time, and might be difficult, and would probably be immaterial. A man may find time, during a long disappearance, for other pursuits than yellow fever, though of the same colour. I had come back as poor as I went away—apparently, that is to say. And then suddenly I opened a banking account with that note; my own account of the transaction consisting of such suppressions of truth and of such obvious lies as only to prove how completely a rogue may overreach himself, if he leaves himself a loop-hole to make a single blunder.

On my own showing, I had said nothing of any receipt of money—though living in the same house with a brother-in-law who knew all my circumstances—except to my wife, who was debarred by law from giving evidence in my favour. The letter in which the cheque (as I alleged) had reached me had not passed through the D—post-office, but, according to my story, had been lost sight of for months, and had only been discovered accidentally. The whole story was in itself very suspiciously lame, even so far.

But the rest looked—fatal. I

was not content with declaring that I had received a re-issued note from the Bank of England. I declared I had received it in payment of a cheque drawn on the 12th of September. And, to sum up all, the Bank had been long ago notified that its customer, Mr. Julius Mendez of Kingston, had been *accidentally drowned in Kingston Harbour on September 11th—the very day after I had left him to the enjoyment of a new lease of life for forty years.* And his cheque-book, containing the counterfoils, had been lost with him; and no evidence remained of his having drawn any such cheque save his letter to me—if it had not been written *by me.* The wholesome practice (which a forger learned the other day to his cost) had not then generally obtained among foreign customers of privately notifying the Bank of cheques drawn by them; at any rate it had not been observed by Mr. Julius Mendez.

And so much for Mr. Julius Mendez, his hopes and his fears! The man who had nothing to dread, save a death by disease on or before a certain Saturday, had perished by misadventure on the following Sunday. Perhaps he had mistaken his fifty-seventh birthday; perhaps not: but who can tell? At any rate there must have been some mistake—somewhere.

But his mistake was a terrible misadventure for me. Nothing but the nature of Mr. Robert Deacon's defence for me—that no official or expert could detect the slightest sign or symptom of forgery on the face of the note—warranted my admission to bail upon so serious a charge as forgery upon the Bank of England, which had been a hanging matter till within only a very few years

before. I don't know whether I have even yet made clear the whole gravity of the charge. It was not a mere question whether a country doctor should be sent to Botany Bay. The question reached far beyond the bearings of the criminal law—it affected the whole machinery of the Bank of England. I have no doubt that many secret courts of inquiry were held in Threadneedle-street before and after my arrest—which was most surely called for. Was it possible, in spite of the perfection to which the manufacture of notes had been carried even then, that a mere amateur should be able to copy one of them so perfectly as to deceive the most expert eyes? Or, worse still, was foul play at work among the most trusted servants and officers of the Bank of England—was there a vast conspiracy whose ramifications must necessarily include many officials in the highest places? My lies might prove my personal guilt; but the nature of the note, assuming its forged character, seemed to disprove the possibility of my being solely responsible. I have mentioned the keynote of my defence. But, when once struck, nothing could prevent its coming to this: that I had presented a cheque which had been suppressed or forged in order that an old note, stolen from the furnace, might be put into my hands, as part and parcel of some system of fraud or plunder the nature of which was as yet beyond guessing. That a note of the same amount had been given, on the 10th of May, in payment of a cheque drawn by Mr. Mendez appeared, from the books, to be clear; but it was of a different number, and had not yet returned. But this only made the whole matter more alarming in the labyrinth of suspicion which it threw open.

If any one of my readers chanced to be acquainted with any Bank official whose position or age should naturally imply some recollection of these matters, he may—perhaps—learn more of the details of these inquiries than I can possibly tell him. But it is far more likely that the more is remembered, the less will be told. I know that for my own part I should not like to ask any such questions, unless I wanted to be answered by a snub or a jest according to the character of him whom I ventured to question. Banks should be, and are, confessionals; and unless some outsider like myself, who is bound by no confidential duties, tells what he knows, the psychology of gold must remain an unexplored field for ever.

The nature of my defence, and what it must needs lead to, although set up by his son, horrified old Mr. Deacon. He had for the Bank of England, only in an intensified form, the feeling that other men have for their old regiments and colleges—he did not believe in my guilt, because he believed in Annie; but his son's defence was like a sacrilegious attempt to upset the world. 'There have been forgers enough,' he said, 'especially when they used to be hanged, and there have been bank-clerks among them now and then, and they were *always* hanged. But I'll sooner believe that Mrs. Wilson, there, herself, forged a thousand-pound note with her own hands, than that the "Old Lady" isn't everything she ought to be. I must be a good deal older than I am yet before I take to putting the old times before the new; and I'll find out the whole thing myself, if I have to put off the pump twenty years more.'

But it seemed unlikely that he would find out anything for me or against me, if for Annie's sake or

for the Bank's he put off the pump for another century. I need not tell the nature of the cloud that came over me at D—— while I was waiting to be tried. Pride and prudence combined forbade me to leave the place, even though all but the very poorest patients refused the prescriptions of a medical man who would soon be a slave in Botany Bay. I made a point of being seen about in the streets, and held my head up very high; but I felt the cloud over us all, and how near it was to breaking into a final and crushing storm. Perhaps my need to be brave for Annie's sake obliged me to show more courage than I felt; but it was only the courage of the ostrich, after all. Of what other sort could it be in those days? In a few short weeks, she and the boy would be the wife and child of a convicted felon; and what end would that mean, for them? I am bound to tell my story plainly. It is the only way in which such stories can ever be told.

The first that I heard of any secret inquiry was a communication from Mr. Robert Deacon that the Bank would give me all facilities for identifying the clerk who had, according to my story, cashed my alleged cheque, if I thought fit to use them. The point had given rise to a great many questions on both sides. But at last it was arranged that I should try the experiment—indeed I should have to do it sooner or later, and I was convinced that I could as certainly put my finger on the clerk who had given me the note as upon the note he had given.

I believe it had been ascertained what clerks had been at the desks at the paying counter on the day in question. At any rate, in company with my solicitor and with old Mr. Deacon, I once more travelled to London, and then left

them in one of the private offices while I walked the length of the counter. All was just as I had seen it before. I went to the same writing desk in the same window, that I might place myself in precisely the same circumstances as before, listened for a moment to the same ticking and scratching, and then turned round, just as some clock outside struck the first stroke of noon. I noticed it at the moment as a coincidence (though certainly not as a curious one) that the hour was the same, to a stroke, as when I had just finished indorsing my cheque on that 10th of May.

I saw twelve clerks at twelve desks; but the Thirteenth, for whom I was looking, I did *not* see. I hardly knew whether to feel uneasy or relieved. To have seen him might have had the effect of relieving me from my own peril; but, on the other hand, I almost shuddered at the thought of seeing again that ghastly face of hopeless evil behind the shoulder of the clerk who had looked at me so curiously after my receipt of the money. No—certainly he was not at the counter, nor was he to be seen in the room, though my eyes went all over it, from desk to desk, in search of him. And yet I had been assured that *every* clerk present on that 10th of May was present now—that none had died or left the Bank, and that those who had changed situations in it had been sent back to their old desks for to-day. I could not suspect the directors of the Bank of England or their advisers of conspiracy to shield their system or their officers—my own liberty was hardly more important to myself than the necessity of probing the whole mystery to the bottom was to them. I no longer dreaded to meet that clerk's face now. I waited minute after minute, get-

ting feverish with eagerness to find him, until, almost for a whole moment, I even fancied that I caught sight of him in the air. But that was only an instant's transparent illusion, born of anxiety. There was no use in lengthening our suspense—he was *not* there.

'Well?' asked Mr. Allen, the director present at the interview.

'I can only say that I have not seen him,' I could but answer, while I felt my heart sink in me. I knew what sort of look passed between Mr. Allen, and Mr. Ash the lawyer, and Mr. Brown from the office of the Chief Cashier. And I knew it would have been shared by my own lawyer, had he not been representing me; and by myself, had I been sitting in judgment on another man.

'No: I have not seen him—to-day,' I went on, after full time for that look, and more. 'And I know what my not having seen him means—to me. But nevertheless he was there, at that desk, on that 10th of May; and he cashed that cheque with that bank-note as surely as I am a living man. In that one thing I cannot forget, I cannot even be mistaken, in what I saw with my own eyes. I don't expect you to believe me. But I cannot help believing myself; and it is true.'

'Well,' said Mr. Allen, 'we have now done all that we met for; there is nothing more to be said, that I can see. Mr. Deacon,' he said, turning to my solicitor, 'you are satisfied that we have given Mr. Wilson every opportunity for identifying the clerk who paid him that note. He says that he received it from a clerk who never even existed. Have you anything to say?'

Mr. Robert Deacon shrugged his shoulders—a little diplomatically, I am afraid. 'Only that Mr. Wilson has failed to remember one

bank-clerk from another; nothing more. Many people remember faces badly—we don't rest our defence on my client's memory, you know.'

'But I do!' I could not help exclaiming, heedless of the look of angry warning that my lawyer threw me—surely I had committed myself to lies enough already without adding any more to the pile; and, as is well known, a prisoner who talks is the leading counsel for the crown. 'It is because I remember the man that I say he did pay me that note, and that I say now he is not there. If I did not remember him, I should say that, though I do not recognise him, he may be there. There are some faces that the worst memory cannot lose—his is one.'

'Perhaps Mr. Wilson can describe him?' asked Mr. Allen.

'Certainly not!' said Mr. Robert Deacon. 'Whatever he has to say his counsel will say for him at the right place and time. But this is not a court, and no one here has a right to ask questions—as Mr. Ash will tell you.'

'I can describe him,' I said; 'and, since this is not a court, I have a right to speak—and I will. He—that clerk—'

'Do you understand that I throw up your case,' whispered Mr. Robert Deacon sharply, 'if you say one word?'

'So be it,' said I. 'Since there was such a man, my description will find him. For aught I know the note may be forged, but not the man. Every detail of my whole story is true, from beginning to end; and I will answer everything, if it were to hang me. I can describe the clerk who cashed the cheque with that note as exactly as if I had seen him a hundred times. He was a short, bent, shrivelled, elderly man of at least fifty; but he may be sixty, or

more. He was quite bald, fearfully pale, and looking almost fleshless: he had an ashy, sallow, partly livid complexion, and dark deep-set eyes. It was a face never to be forgotten, if only seen once and never again. He wore a snuff-coloured quaker coat with large pockets, and a waistcoat of flowered silk, and he had many yards of frilled cambric round his neck, in the style, I should think, of at least seventy years ago. If such a man has ever been in the Bank of England—and I know there was such a man here at twelve o'clock on the 10th of May—he can easily be found.'

'I should say most decidedly that he could be found,' said Mr. Allen.

'And I should say most decidedly that he can *not* be found,' said Mr. Brown. 'And for the very obvious reason that there is no such clerk here.'

'But there was at twelve o'clock on the 10th of May,' said I. 'You cannot convince me that I have not seen what I *have* seen. I tell you he was a man whom no living eyes could forget. He looks like a living corpse—a corpse buried in its clothes seventy years ago, and unable to rest in its grave. No; I cannot be wrong. I noted every detail of face and costume. I can even tell you more. His face was marked by a large scar, running almost from the ear to the centre of the forehead and across the cheek-bone. His cravat was fastened by a curious old brooch with a setting of seed pearls, containing a lock of reddish-brown hair, fastened by a lover's knot in pearls, between the letters A and H. He—'

'Good God!' cried out old Mr. Deacon, hitherto silent, with the whole power of a voice that made the windows rattle. 'Good God! He's seen old Ayscough! . . . He's

seen the living Corpse of Isaac Ayscough as sure as I'm a living man near ninety years old! Haven't you ever heard, Mr. Allen—and you, Mr. Brown—that the Ghost of Isaac Ayscough, that hanged Fred Hawes sixty years ago, is always at a clerk's elbow when he cashes the cheque of a Dead Man? That always used to be the story, as younger men than I am will tell you, ever since the old scoundrel cheated the gallows and went—where hanging would be mercy. I've seen that brooch, and I've seen *him*, every day for twenty years—and that's He! . . . A. H—it's the hair of Nancy Hawes, poor girl! . . . The doctor has seen old Isaac Ayscough, who's paid with the Ghost of a burnt bank-note the cheque of a Dead Man!'

—

VI.

I am now nearly as old as old Mr. Deacon was then; and I am writing, or rather remembering, this strange chapter of my life in my own quiet study, in the quiet town which has been the scene of my life and my work ever since I came home from Jamaica, and where Annie and I kept our golden wedding—made of better gold than all in the Bank of England—years ago. I shall presently make an end of my story, in my own way. But first I must state one fact, which may possibly help the reader to a different reading of it than old Mr. Deacon's, though, as I shall show presently, it never satisfied him, and does not satisfy me.

The fact was this: when, at ten o'clock on the morning after my failure to see thirteen clerks in the private Drawing-room, the chief cashier opened his letters, he found in one of the envelopes, unaccompanied by any letter, or word, or

any token to show whence or from whom it came, a Bank of England note for one thousand pounds. On comparing its number with the proper entries it was found to be the note which, according to these entries, had been given to me in payment of Mr. Mendez's cheque on the 10th of May.

Now what should this imply? It may now be taken as impossible that any official of the Bank of England, high or low, would if he could, or could if he would, abstract from the notes to be burned on return one or more of them in order that he might, by paying or causing to be paid this old note over the counter, and by entering a new note instead of it, appropriate the new note to his own pocket. But it may certainly be taken that the machinery of the Bank was less absolutely perfect then than now; and it is just possible to suppose such an abstraction of an old note, and such an entry and appropriation of a new one. The old note would have been given to me. The new note would have been entered in place of it, but retained. If the manipulator was low in office and acting alone, he would run no more chances of detection than rogues always run; if high in office, or the instrument of one high in office, detection would be exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, supposing the checks and machineries to have been then imperfect enough to make the original manipulation possible at all. I know not the whole result or course of the farther investigations to which the return of the new note (whether for anonymously getting an innocent man out of an unexpected peril, or for the sake of throwing overboard a dangerous piece of property, or as part and parcel of the scheme, and by way of restoring a balance) gave rise. Whether

the clerk who stood at the unlucky desk suffered alone, or whether any higher official suffered with him, or whether any malpractices were brought to light on the part of anybody, I never learned. But this I do know, that the checks and machinery of the Bank of England have, since these investigations, become in these matters a type and model of absolute perfection; and that, when I surrendered to take my trial, no evidence was offered of my having forged or uttered a note which nobody could say with the least reason had been forged at all. I might have dreamed, I might have lied; but neither dreams nor simple lies are crimes, and I was discharged.

But, as I have said, this way of accounting for the mystery did not satisfy the mind of a man like old Mr. Deacon, who would believe anything rather than that the machinery of the Bank of England was more capable of breaking down at a pinch than that of the Solar System. And I *knew* that I had seen Isaac Ayscough—how else could my eyes, however excited, and my nerves, however highly strung, have imagined one whom I had never seen alive?—and I know it still.

No death-sleep has he, the corpse of the man who murdered his friend by treachery and destroyed the brain of the girl whom he loved with what *he* called love—perhaps, before her brain, her woman's soul. Every day the rotting ghost is drawn, as if by a lodestone, to the desk whereon, in the flesh, it wrote its sin, turned to remorse now. It stood there day after day in the flesh; day after day the sin-corrupted spirit toils there still, at the old place and in the same old way. Perhaps its fingers, scratching ghostly entries, give a flavour of charnel-luck to

the very desk where it stands. But, more than doom enough for it, it cannot escape; it must toil there, and rot on. And what work is there for such a ghost to do?

Enough, surely, and to spare. Such a ghost as this can never be without plenty of customers. If there be ghosts that haunt the scenes of common murder, how much more closely must not ghosts be bound to the scenes of gold and of passion, which are the very roots of murder? If they are bound to places which they loathe, how much more must they not haunt the places which contained the whole of their earthly treasure? Where the ghost of the treasure was, there may one look to find the ghost of the heart also. What is to become of those who never had any soul other than a lump of gold? There is no fitter doom for such than to wander round their grand treasure-house, learning by slow steps the vanity of a treasure which a dead hand cannot hold. The only lesson they are capable of is to spend an age or two in dealing with the mockery, which is the truth, of gold till they learn to hate its very name and ring, till they know how infinitely more precious are moonbeams. Yes, a ghost like Isaac Ayscough must have customers enough, and to spare.

I can see him still, in fancy, as I saw him once in visible fact, receiving what, by the ghostly error of a ghostly clerk, he mistook for a ghostly cheque drawn by a dead man from the hands of one who looked like a ghost, so worn out was I by the shadow of death through which I had so lately gone. The cheque post-dated by a day (according to the habit of some persons) for the sake of avoiding a Sunday had become on its face the draft of a dead man; and if a living man may mistake a phantom

for a fellow-mortal, it should follow that a dead man may mistake a living one for a fellow-phantom. I can still, when I will, see him as I saw him then, paying a dead customer in the ghosts of notes that had become no longer current among living men. Be it remembered that matter, like spirit, never dies. Burn a bank-note as thoroughly as you will, its particles are not destroyed, and may be restored by the process of ghostly cohesion, which, if such a thing be at all, is just as applicable to paper and to engraver's ink as to flesh and bone. A good book lives for ever in its soul, like a good man; a document, which may in its real life have been the cause or instrument of evil, would live on in its body, like an evil man. The body may die, but the corpse may live; the paper may be burned, but the written words are not to be blotted out merely by man-kindled fire. Whether such a paper ghost is to be rematerialised by contact with living fingers is a question without an answer, unless my story may be taken in some sort as an answer thereto.

In any case, there, behind the counter over which cheques are paid,—there I know in my inner brain stands the corpse of Isaac Ayscough, in his habit, in his sin, and in his remorse as he lived, honouring with burned bank-notes the cheques of dead men. The live bank-clerk who deals with the living has only, as the clock strikes noon, to turn his head quickly enough to see the hideous and loathsome corpse of Isaac Ayscough at his very elbow. I know not if those livid remnants of lips ever whisper to the inner ears of their living desk-fellow. If so, I doubt if the hearer would ever tell the nature of the whisper which his heart hears, only it must fare ill with him if he be not in all things a true and honest man. If he be

not, such whispers must carry with them the contagion of the wasting and burning flesh whence they come.

But this is a narrative of a fact, not an investigation into theories. I do not think that honesty need fear any desk-fellow, dead or alive. It is for a customer to beware who,

having a cheque to present, catches the evil eye of a dead murderer, and worse than murderer, standing at the counter. By all the signs I have set down he may know himself to be face to face with the Ghost in the Bank of England, whom Lust and Greed will not suffer to sleep in the grave.

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES.

CHRISTMAS fires are burning bright,
And the glowing embers fall;
Lines of rosy flickering light
Steal along the dusky wall.

Now is hushed the noise of day
In that fairy magic glow;
Memory takes her silent way
To the land of Long Ago.

Ah me, what sweet visions rise
From that Past that never dies !
Dear, dear faces, loving eyes,
Fill my heart with tearful sighs.

Stay with us, sweet visions, stay ;
Never, never pass away ;
Through each cloud and sunlit day
Keep your tender watch for aye.

THE LEGEND OF THE WILLOW-PATTERN PLATE.

LI-CHI was a maiden with nothing to do
But to sit still and dream, or sip tea (without cream),
Or give ear to the coo of her doves (there were two),
Or eat sweetmeats, her fondness for which was extreme.

Her pa was a mandarin, wealthy and great,
And pompous withal, a position so big held he;
His house and estate may be seen in the plate,
Though portrayed in a style somewhat higgledy-piggledy.

The trees, some like feathers, and some like piled stones,
Are quite a burlesque of the science of botany;
For Hooker would swear by Linnaeus's bones
That like them in Nature there surely are not any.

How like a bird's claw spreads the uncovered root
Of the comical willow! But queerest of trees is
The one on the right, from whose waving arms shoot,
Not leaves, but great puddings, as round as Dutch cheeses!

But perhaps it's too bad to make fun of old crockery
(A lengthy digression's undoubtedly wrong);
And our story still less is a subject for mockery:
It is so pathetic, though not very long.

A young man named Chang, with a lovely pigtail,
Kept the mandarin's books of receipts and expenses;
And Li-Chi at his step would turn red and then pale,
And a gentle commotion would steal o'er her senses.

For when a young lady has nothing to do
But to sit still and dream, as related above,
The chances at least are as twenty to two
That her favourite dream is of *falling in love*.

And their eyes having met—how or why, they knew not—
As she sat in a balcony fondling a kitten,
Li-Chi was enamoured of Chang on the spot,
And Chang, in like manner, with Li-Chi was smitten.

What had happened was quickly suspected, because
Li-Chi every day grew more pensive and 'moony';
And Chang couldn't long hide the fact that he was
What the unsympathetic are apt to call 'spoony.'

With blushes as soft as the tints of the dawn are,
 She heard his fond vows,—but, unluckily, so did
 Her pa, who then chanced to be just round the corner;
 And on Chang, with a bang, his displeasure exploded.

Said he, in deep tones, like the sound of a gong,
 'These fine goings-on I object to *in toto* !
 What next? Go along! Get you hence to Hong-Kong!
 Or (the further the better) the moon you may go to!'

But, as that destination was not to his mind,
 Chang fled to his own island home with his fair one
 (A view of it, drawn in the pattern, you'll find,
 Close to where the horizon would be, if there were one).

This hearing, the mandarin, snatching a whip,
 Up and down his domains began wildly to tear about;
 His moustache (that had hung like rats' tails from his lip)
 Bristling up at an angle of forty or thereabout.

Then, with language profane, and with threats of the cane
 Applied in the manner they call *bastinado*,
 He went in pursuit of Li-Chi and her swain—
 What less could a parent who would be obeyed do?

Now the conjurer's art and electro-biology,
 And such things, are wondrous and strange; but you'll see it is
 A fact, if you'll turn to your heathen mythology,
 That they're fairly outdone by the tricks of the deities.

Only think of the self-transformations of Jove
 (Who, if mortal, I fear would be thought a sad dog)
 When, in search of adventures, he sometimes would rove
 Far from heaven, and wanted to travel *incog.*!

So the gods, looking down through the gathering mists
 At eve, saw the lovers, whose plight so concerned them,
 That, to shield them in peace from the mandarin's fists,
 They graciously *into two turtle-doves turned them!*

At the top of the pattern you'll find them depicted,
 Each with two pairs of wings; but you're left to imagine
 The kicks upon innocent people inflicted,
 And the uproar the mandarin vented his rage in.

And of such a surprising romance of devotion
 As the quaint Chinese pattern's designed to perpetuate,
 You'll freely confess that you hadn't a notion,
 When last off a plate of a blue-willow 'set' you ate.